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The CHARM SCHOOL

Alice Duer Miller

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[See page 117

"When I'm an old, withered woman like Miss Curtis," she answered, "I shall love you just as I do tonight."

THE
CHARM SCHOOL

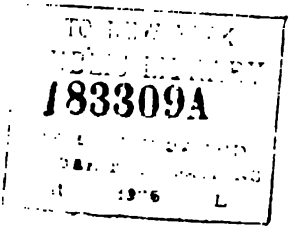
By

ALICE DUER MILLER

Author of
Come Out of the Kitchen
Ladies Must Live etc.

Illustrated

Harper & Brothers Publishers
New York and London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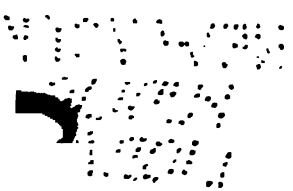

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"When I'm an old, withered woman like Miss Curtiss," she answered, "I shall love you just as I do to-night" . . . . . *Frontispiece*

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THE CHARM SCHOOL

THE CHARM SCHOOL

CHAPTER I

"THE trouble with you, Mr. Bevans," said Mrs. Rolles, gently, "is that you really are the least little bit vulgar."

"Good!" said he. "I knew there was something nice about me."

Mrs. Rolles smiled imperturbably. With her hands lying palms upward in her lap, she was leaning back with that calm which good breeding brings only to those who believe absolutely in its supremacy. She was a woman of fifty, not handsome, but with all the marks of race—small ears flat to the head; a long, slender throat; fine, soft hair, and delicate hands, a little too clawlike for beauty. Her drawing-room in which they were sitting was a hideous room. It had

been furnished for her by her parents on the occasion of her marriage in the year 1891. It was so long for its width that it had the effect of being a brocaded tunnel; the walls were hung with pale pink, on which electric lights and French water-colors alternated; the chairs were, of course, copies of Louis XV, and the mantelpiece was as crowded as a lawn-party with Dresden figures. No books were visible, except a copy of the *Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines,* bound in black-and-gold, and three immense volumes of steel-engravings from the National Gallery. The house had a library—up-stairs in what had before Mr. Rolles's death been her bedroom—but the drawing-room was no place for reading; it was the place for just such terrible interviews as the one now taking place there.

The young man was of the most extraordinary beauty—not only of face, but of figure, for he was as lithe and active as a cat, but his conspicuous feature was his eyes —eyes of the clearest sky blue, in surprising contrast to his bronzed skin and black hair and lashes. He was clean-shaven, so that a mouth of sensitive curves could be seen, and a chin that contradicted those curves by its firm aggression.

"You don't really think it nice to be vulgar," Mrs. Rolles went on, "if for no other reason than because it is the one thing that Susie and I can't forgive."

"Well, if I can forgive Susie her refinement, I think she ought to be able to forgive me a nice little trace of vulgarity. We shall do very well. She can teach me to be refined and a touch of my vulgarity will improve her immensely."

Mrs. Rolles shook her head. "You would be the last person to find it an improvement," she said.

Bevans struck the tea-table lightly with his fist. "Now that's where you're wrong," he said. "I really can't see that refinement is anything but a weakness; it seems to consist entirely in things you can't do. Susie can't go out without a maid, she can't go in a trolley-car, she can't wear ready-made clothes—all liabilities. Tell me one single positive thing that her being a lady enables her to do."

Her mother, without an instant's hesitation, answered, "She can charm." She scored heavily.

Bevans groaned. There was no denying that Susie had done so in his case.

Elated by success, Mrs. Rolles pushed on:

"Charm," she opined, "is the refinement of the soul," and she felt she might almost be quoting Emerson or the Psalms.

"Oh, I'm all right, then," answered Bevans, cheerfully. "I don't stick up for my manners, and I know my looks are fierce—"

"Fierce!" exclaimed his hostess. "I should have thought you would be above pretending not to know you are extremely handsome."

Bevans wriggled. "Don't let's talk about it," he said. "I believe it's the only thing in the world it embarrasses me to speak of. I hate looking like this; it's a great disadvantage; it makes every one distrust me, particularly employers. I'd give anything in the world for a good ugly mug like David's—and the joke of it is, he isn't a bit more honest and serious than I am—only every one thinks he must be."

"Mr. Stewart has a very aristocratic kind of ugliness," said Mrs. Rolles, reprovingly.

"But to go back to the question of my soul," Bevans went on. "I'd match souls with any one—even some of our oldest families'—even Susie's, which is, I am sure, an attractive mauve trifle."

"It isn't necessary to be profane," said Mrs. Rolles.

"No, but it helps a lot when you're not feeling very cheerful."

When she was in complete control of a situation Mrs. Rolles could be very kind, and she felt no doubt at the present moment of the completeness of her control. "I think you know, Mr. Bevans," she said, graciously, "that I sincerely like you, that I find you a stimulating intelligence, but you must admit that you are very different from most of the young men whom Susie has about her."

"Flatterer!"

The lady stiffened. "I do not consider it a compliment to tell you you are different from the other men who come to the house. You would do well to model yourself upon them—well-bred, well-connected young people. If they have not money, they have tradition, and you, Mr. Bevans, as far as I know, have neither."

"I have a feeling I'm going to make a lot of money some day," said Bevans, but his manner betrayed a knowledge that his position was weak.

"Indeed?" returned his hostess, dryly. "Well, you know you cannot support a wife on that feeling."

There was a pause. Bevans got up—not so

much because he had any intention of going, as because he felt too wretched to sit still.

"I'm not doing so badly," he began.

"Let me see—you are an automobile salesman?" said Mrs. Rolles, and if she had said, you are a creeping worm, she would not have needed to change her tone.

"Yes, and a very good one, too," returned Bevans. "I sold a car yesterday to old Johns, Homer Johns of the New Republic Bank, you know?"

Mrs. Rolles inclined her head; she herself kept a very small balance at the New Republic, and insisted in return that the president should see her whenever she stopped in and advise her about investments.

"Well, then you know he's not an easy man to manage, and he did not really want this car a bit, yet I sold it to him, and even made him drive me home in it. It isn't every man could do that, now is it, Mrs. Rolles?" He looked at her wistfully, but she would not catch his eye. She was thinking that it was really high time for him to go, or Susie, obediently keeping out of the way in response to a parental command, might get restless.

"Some of Susie's friends have married much vulgarer people than me," he pleaded.

"Than *I*," said Mrs. Rolles.

Bevans sighed, and began what seemed to be an effort to dig his toe permanently into the rug. "You don't seem to attach the least importance to Susie's affection for me."

Mrs. Rolles smiled. "Shall I be perfectly candid?" she asked.

It is a question at which the stoutest heart sinks, which every one would like to answer in the negative, but to which good usage seems to demand that an enthusiastic affirmative be given.

"Good Lord!" cried Bevans, "is there still worse to come?"

There was. "The truth is," said Mrs. Rolles, "that Susie's feelings are not deep. She never has and I don't believe she ever will care deeply for any one. Now, I don't mean by that that she is a cold, calculating villain. Quite the contrary. She is kind, unselfish, and in her own way affectionate, only no one matters very much to her. Her nurses, her teachers, her friends have always loved her better than she loved them. She accepts their love as a sort of natural responsibility. I really believe, in my own way, I like you better than she does—shall miss you more when you stop coming here."

"But I have no intention of stopping coming."

She smiled. "When you stop getting in, then."

"Oh," cried he, "isn't life rottenly arranged! By the time I'm an old man I shall probably have all the money I want, and I'd gladly sell the last twenty years of my life for a good income at this moment."

"If we could make those bargains there would be no old people in the world," remarked Mrs. Rolles.

"Perhaps it wouldn't be any the worse on that account."

She did not seem offended. "Dear me!" she said, "you're worse than Herod with the babies. You'd sacrifice all the old without a qualm. But perhaps you have some elderly relation with money."

He shook his head emphatically. "No indeed, or I'd be off now to wring their necks. The only relation I have is an old aunt by marriage who runs a girls' school in Westchester."

"Oh yes!" Mrs. Rolles nodded. "The Bevans School. I once thought of sending Susie there, but they want to teach girls mathematics, and college requirements, and

all the things I disapprove of most in a girl's education."

"How ought a girl to be educated?" said Bevans, who had thought on this as on many other irrelevant subjects.

"She ought to be educated to be charming."

"Is there any way of doing that?—there'd be money in it, if there were."

"There's a way of educating her not to be —your aunt's way. Dear me! I remember there was a young woman there teaching geometry—the minute I saw her I withdrew Susie's name—so hard, so competent. However, this was several years ago. I dare say it has improved." She held out her hand cordially, but he did not notice the gesture.

"Mrs. Rolles," he said, "I really am awfully in love with Susie."

"And six months from now you'll be awfully in love with some one else."

"Why do you say that?"

"Men are never constant to the unattainable."

He couldn't help laughing at her tone, though her meaning was so unpalatable. "Perhaps not," he said, "but, you see, I don't admit that she is unattainable—not so long as she loves me."

"Has she ever said she loved you?"

He was silent. She hadn't. She had said she liked him better than any one else—even David, for, of course, David was in love with her, too; she had told him he never bored her, and he knew, though he could not admit it even to himself, that when they went about together she enjoyed the sensation his appearance always made. She had written him quantities of the nicest notes—Susie could write the pleasantest notes, in the neatest little hand—and, since it had been clearly understood between them that he always came on Thursdays, she had been wonderfully kind in never allowing any one to interfere with him. But he could not feel that all these taken together indicated a great passion, and now, with Mrs. Rolles's cold eye upon him, they seemed particularly paltry.

He had met Susie five years before when, as a girl of sixteen, she had come to his senior dance at the invitation of David Stewart. He had thought her a lovely, fairy-like being and had danced with her as many times in the evening as he could. Two years later, when she came out, he had found a snap-shot of her in a newspaper and had cut it out and carried it in his pocket-

book, so that it was very easy to say, when he met her again, though not strictly true, that he had fallen in love with her at first sight at his senior dance. Anyhow, it *was* always said between them, and believed—by Susie at least. David, however, could have testified, if he had been disloyally inclined, which he wasn't, that many photographs had preceded the magnificent full length of Susie which now occupied the place of honor on Bevans's desk. He was so subject to enthusiasms that a fair share of them were bound to be feminine.

Mrs. Rolles suddenly decided to be drastic.

"Good-by, Mr. Bevans," she said. "And now that we are really parting, let me give you a bit of advice. Do learn to make an exit. So few young men can. Don't stand about first on one foot and then on the other long after you have made up your mind to go."

Bevans was not, of course, superior to the almost sacred terror that Mrs. Rolles inspired in young men, particularly when she talked like this, but it was immensely to the credit of his courage that after the wave of panic had passed he stood his ground. He smiled now very sweetly at her. "But you see," he said, "I haven't made up my mind to go—not until I see Susie."

"Susie's out, I'm afraid," said her mother, in a tone politely false.

"Oh no, she's not!" said he, and, stepping to the door, he opened it and shouted at the top of a good pair of lungs, "Susie!"

"That is impertinent," observed Mrs. Rolles, more as a critic of manners than as an outraged parent.

"Our modern efficiency," answered Bevans, and then suddenly lost all his lightness of touch as Susie entered.

She was the sort of young woman about whom ideals easily cluster, for she was pretty, pale, and almost totally non-committal. Some people believed her to be simply unawakened; others cherished the belief that beneath an iron reserve she seethed with emotions. Susie never did anything to contradict either hypothesis. When she was reproached with concealing her feelings, she smiled and shook her head with just the same manner as when she was reproached with having no feelings to conceal.

Standing now with her hand on her mother's shoulder, she smiled at Bevans as if she thought him very good to look at, which represented her opinion most accurately.

"Susie," he said, "what are we going to do? I have no money to speak of, and your mother won't hear of our being engaged."

"Oh, Austin," she murmured, as if a little shocked at the last word, "what could we possibly do?"

"We might be engaged, anyhow."

"Secretly?"

"Not so damned secretly—but without your mother's consent." He looked at her, hoping to see some sign of rebellion.

"Oh, I couldn't do that," she said.

"You could if you cared anything about me."

"I shall never forget you," she answered, and indeed as he stood looking at her with his eyes like two blue flames no woman would have been able to forget him.

"I'll never give you the chance," he said, and flung himself out of the room.

When he was gone, her mother looked at her and said, chattily, "My dear, you have no human feelings, have you?"

Susie was naturally startled and annoyed. "Mamma," she said, "I thought I did just what you would think wise."

"So you did," answered her mother, hastily. "No one ever said that human feelings were wise."

Bevans in the mean time was walking gloomily home. Even one of his company's new cars painted a geranium pink picked out in black failed to raise more than a passing interest in his mind. He was depressed not only at Susie's coolness, but by a sudden conviction that had come over him that he was not a man who would ever inspire a lasting love. And when two girls actually stopped and walked backward to stare at him as he passed, his only thought was a bitter reflection that they wouldn't stick to him a week.

It was a lovely afternoon in the end of February, when something in the faint color of the sky and the gentle movements of the air promised an early spring. The sun was low and struck down the side-street, throwing long shadows, as Bevans turned toward the little east-side park where he and David Stewart had rooms.

David was reading for his bar examinations. He always began to read in a normal, upright position, but as the intellectual strain became greater he sank lower and lower, until finally the elevation of his feet began. When Bevans entered, the intricacies of the subject were such that David was lying on the sofa with his feet festooned over

the back. He was evidently delighted to be interrupted.

"What have you been doing that you oughtn't to do?" was his greeting. "There's a special-delivery letter for you from a firm of lawyers, and a deep male voice has been telephoning at intervals of twenty minutes to know if you have come in yet."

"Lawyers?" said Bevans, without interest, taking up the letter with a languid hand. "It's all up between me and Susie."

David sat up with one motion of his entire body.

"Yesterday it was all on."

"I was wrong. Her feeling seems to be that if some day I came back with enough money to marry she wouldn't be any more opposed to me than to the next man."

"Do you believe it's just the money question?" asked David, loyally.

"I'd go a good way on the downward path to get some at this moment," Bevans answered, and began tearing open the envelop in his hand.

Silences, as every observer knows, have strange characteristics all their own—passionate silences, and hateful silences, and silences full of friendly, purring content. The silence that followed the opening of

Bevans's letter was frankly portentous. It was not that Bevans's manner altered, though there may have been a slight change in the rhythm of his breathing, but somehow David knew at once that the letter contained something of supreme importance. So, being a good friend, he said nothing, but sat watching Bevans out of the corner of his eye as a dog watches his master to see if he is going to be taken for a walk.

Having read the letter twice, Bevans raised his eyes, shining with excitement, and said:

"Dave, I've inherited a school."

"A school? An automobile school?"

"No, a girls' boarding-school."

"A *what?*" said David, who had heard perfectly.

"You see before you," answered his friend, "the principal of the well-known fashionable school — the Bevans Boarding-school for Young Ladies."

"Well, next to inheriting the Sultan's harem, I can't think of anything pleasanter. Now let's have the facts."

But almost all the available facts were already before him. Bevans had not even seen the announcement of his aunt-by-marriage's death in the papers a few weeks

before. Now, her lawyers wrote to say that, as she had left no will, he, as next of kin, appeared to have inherited all her estate. This consisted entirely of her school-grounds of about ten acres overlooking the Sound, two large houses accommodating about fifty pupils with the necessary teaching and household staff, also the small cottage in which Mrs. Bevans herself had lived, all not too heavily mortgaged and yielding the former owner a net income of about $3,000 a year.

"Three thousand a year!" cried David. It seemed to him a very large income.

"And the house," added Bevans.

"You must never go near the place, Austin," said his friend. "If you do, all the little darlings will fall in love with you, and their parents will take them away and the school will be ruined."

"Not go near it!" said Bevans. "I shall live there and direct it exactly as my aunt did—only not in the same direction."

"You're mad," cried David. "*You* at the head of a girls' school!"

"There's money in it and I need money."

"Your face would wreck a thousand schools," cried the other, with conviction.

David's opposition was not to be shaken. He was naturally inclined to conservatism,

and the study of the law had not rendered him more liberal. He had never before heard of a man under thirty owning and managing a girls' school, and therefore for that reason alone he considered the idea inherently wrong. He attempted to argue the question also on practical grounds, but the true basis of his disapproval was its newness. Bevans, on the other hand, with a streak of creativeness in his make-up, was attracted to an idea by its mere unfamiliarity. For David's constantly reiterated assertion that he would make himself ridiculous he cared nothing. What, he asked, could be more ridiculous than to let slip one's great opportunity?

After dinner he put an end to discussion by dressing himself very carefully and going out. When asked where he was going, he replied that he was going to pick up a little capital to start his school right.

CHAPTER II

MR. HOMER JOHNS was in his library —a long, high room lined throughout with books. "Nothing valuable," he was fond of saying, "just a gentleman's library" —a statement which made those who kept all their books in one section of a patent bookcase feel very inferior. The long windows, hung in an old crimson satin, were in recess by the depths of the shelves, and in two of these recesses stood blue-and-yellow globes. At one end of the room a good fire was blazing, and by it, in a large arm-chair, Mr. Johns was sitting, reading the financial article in an evening paper—not because he had the least respect for the writer's opinions, but because, as he often said, he was curious to see how wrong a fellow could be who drew a salary for being right. Mr. Johns had for many years been a stock-broker, who veiled beneath the beauteous name of banker all that was insupportable to him in the former profession. But late in life he had actually become the president

of the great union of banks known as the New Republic. He was a man nearing seventy. In the good old days of piratical finance he had been thought rather moderate, but in regenerate modern times he was sometimes spoken of as "one of the old gang."

"Oh, well," he was thinking, as he read some particularly unmeaning phrase about the decline of values, "if a fellow like that really knew anything, he'd be in the Street and not in a newspaper office," when a footman came in with a card.

Mr. Johns scowled over his spectacles—that scowl was one of his greatest business assets; he had also a priceless grunt which was considered terrifying in the extreme. He read the card and grunted.

"Who the devil is Mr. Austin Bevans? Who is he?"

The footman, though an excellent mimic, and able to do both the scowl and the grunt to perfection in the kitchen, had his nerves—like other artists. He murmured something unintelligible, and Mr. Johns roared:

"What is it? What do you say? I can't hear you."

Steadying himself, the footman explained that it was a young man who said he had

sold Mr. Johns an automobile the day before.

"Why the devil does he come at such an hour as this? Show him in," said Mr. Johns, who had had trouble with the foot-brake of his car.

Almost immediately Bevans was standing in the doorway, looking rather timid, and, except for his evening dress, like a captured faun.

"Evening," said Johns. "I suppose you've come in answer to my note about the brake. Tell your employers from me, will you, that it would be better business—and I'm supposed to know something about business—if they'd give more time to perfecting their machine and less to having to apologize for its defects."

"I haven't come about the car, Mr. Johns," said Austin, with an almost seraphic gentleness. "But I'm sorry there has been trouble with the brake. Your man has probably oiled it."

"My man has done nothing of the kind," shouted Johns in a voice that made the footman waiting in the hall outside tremble. "That's the way with manufacturers nowadays—if their article isn't up to standard, they say it's the consumer's fault. Why

the devil should my man oil it? Do you think I employ fools? And if you haven't come about the car what in hell have you come about?"

"I've come to ask you to lend me some money," said Bevans.

"Why to me?"

"Because you are the only man I know who has much into whose house I thought I could get," replied the young man, unwaveringly.

"And you got in here under false pretenses, sir," shouted Johns, who, it is to be feared, actually valued himself in the rôle of the raging lion. "What right have you to steal my time any more than my money? Men like me have important matters on our minds, and we have a right to peace and leisure in our own homes. My servants have orders to keep out every one—even my own relations—"

"Oh, one's relations," murmured Bevans, as if they always came first on every one's list of outsiders.

"Yes, sir, my relations. And do you suppose that the first little jackanapes who forces his way in to borrow a five-dollar bill—"

"I want to borrow ten thousand dollars," said Austin.

He made just the effect he wanted to. Mr. Johns was so staggered at the sum that he was silent for an instant, and while he was gathering his powers together the young man went on:

"You see, Mr. Johns, a very extraordinary thing has just happened to me."

"You've lost your pocketbook, I suppose."

"No. Queerer than that. I've inherited a girls' school."

"A girls' school! What school? Not—What school?"

"The Bevans School."

"God bless my soul!" said Johns in a tone of such complete surrender that Austin sat down without being asked.

"Mrs. Bevans was my aunt by marriage, and, as she died without a will and I am her nearest of kin, the school is mine."

"Oh," said Johns. "I see! If she had deliberately left it you, she ought to have ended her days in a lunatic-asylum."

"You mean I am not a fit person to manage a girls' school?"

"About the most unfit I ever saw."

"Mr. Johns," said Austin, seriously, "there you are absolutely wrong—as I will prove to you. I am a peculiarly suitable person, infinitely more so, as a matter of fact, than

poor Aunt Sophy. You know as well as I do, sir, that education—one of the great necessities of modern life—is wretchedly behind from a commercial point of view. Educators are not business men—nor even philanthropists; they don't give their services and yet they don't get a big return. Are great fortunes made out of education? No. Why not? I'll tell you: because the one great business principle which has made the commercial success of the stage, the movie and the newspaper has never been applied to education."

"What principle is that?" asked Mr. Johns, not even pretending that he wasn't interested.

"Giving the public what it wants."

"Giving the girls what they want?"

"Mercy, no! Who cares about the girls? No, the parents—the parents of our public in education. Now, Mr. Johns, what is it that every parent who sends a girl to a fashionable school really wants?"

"To get rid of her," answered Johns, with utmost conviction.

"Very true, but that's not all. It's no good to get rid of them for four or five years and then have them back on their hands forever. Parents want them made into

charming women — marriageable women. Parents don't dare to say this—least of all to teachers, of whom they are naturally afraid. They talk a lot of bunk about cultivation and womanliness, but what they really mean is attractiveness—they want their daughters to be charming and have beaux—of course they do. Well, my scheme is to meet the parents half-way. To come out boldly and say that the object of my school is to teach charm. And, by heavens! I'll teach 'em—have 'em taught, that is."

"By constant personal contact with young ladies?" asked Johns, mildly.

"Quite the contrary," answered Bevans, firmly. "I shall hold myself entirely aloof. I shall be an unseen power. Oh, I shall speak to the assembled school whenever it is necessary to put over an idea. I shall set my ideals before them. Now when a dear old fat woman like my aunt told them to stand up straight and lower their voices, they didn't pay the least attention, but when a young man about their own age tells them, you'll find it makes a lot more impression. Do you see the idea?"

"I think I get your point."

"Another thing I mean to do," Bevans went on. "I shall let it be known that I

accept only promising material—only girls that in my opinion may be made charming. Of course, as a matter of fact I shall take pretty much any one, just as my aunt did, but it will give them all a wonderful sense of having been specially selected, allowed in on their looks. We'll have a waiting-list as long as your arm."

"Hem!" said Mr. Johns. "One difficulty occurs to me. School-girls are notoriously silly creatures. Suppose they all took it into their heads to fall in love with you. You know your appearance—"

"Please don't let us speak of that," said Austin, turning his toes slightly inward, as was his habit in moments of embarrassment. "For as a matter of fact I am not a man who inspires affection."

"You surprise me," said Mr. Johns, quite politely.

"Thank you," returned the other, "and, anyway, I'm in love with another girl, and only interested in this whole scheme in the hope of getting enough money to marry her before she sees some one she likes better—so I really don't care what my pupils do—as long as the school succeeds. But even accepting your warning—suppose they did fall in love with me? All the better. We

should immediately sublimate the emotion into love of their work."

"You would do what?"

"Sublimate their emotion. Not familiar with the works of Freud?"

"Never heard of him."

"Mercy! you've led a sheltered life! Well, in a word, the Freudian theory is that though our lower emotions are always there, trying to sweep us down-stream, if properly understood they may be dammed up and made to run the useful mills of every-day life."

"I don't get it."

"Oh, I'll lend you a book about it, but don't leave it about. But the point is that if any of them should develop a sentiment for me, she'd work all the harder."

"I see," said Johns. "Pass her college entrance to please you, if not to please her parents."

"College," cried Austin. "I shall not allow my girls to go to college."

"The Bevans School has always made a specialty of college examinations," said Mr. Johns.

"Why, how did you know that?"

"No matter. Some girls are very intellectually ambitious."

"Mr. Johns, would you want your daughter to go to college?"

"No."

"Well, if she came to my school, I would guarantee that she wouldn't want to, either."

"How would you accomplish that?"

"Oh, it's a question of understanding psychology. The indirect suggestion, you know. Every fine-looking man who came to lecture to them on architecture or the drama or geology would be instructed to slip in somewhere that no really attractive woman ever had been to college—Cleopatra, you know, and Juliet. You'll see. Within a year not a girl would be hired to go."

"Well, if you can accomplish that I'll lend you ten thousand dollars gladly. My granddaughter's there."

"Good heavens!" cried Bevans. "Are you one of my parents?"

"One of your parents, sir!"

"You know what I mean. I never suspected it."

"I did not mean that you should until I had examined your scheme. Well, I approve of all of your ideas. When do you begin?"

"At once. I'm going there to-morrow to

look things over and address the school, and next week I shall move in."

"To address the school?"

"A short talk on my ideals to teachers and pupils."

"I'll take you up in the car."

"Thank you," said Bevans, "but with my new responsibilities, I don't know that I ought to trust myself in a car whose foot-brake doesn't work."

"Oh, don't be a fuss," said Johns. "The brake's all right."

David, who got up at five to study, had already gone to bed when Austin came home, so he heard nothing of the evening's work, and was much astonished the next morning to see his friend beautifully dressed in a suit of gray clothes, with a blue tie exactly the color of his eyes, stepping into an immense car in which an elderly man was already seated, smoking a cigar.

Bevans had not slept at all—the penalty of an active mind. He had done better: he had outlined his speech, rewritten the school circular, and altered the curriculum. He got up feeling more refreshed than if he had rested.

The morning was calm and mild. They moved north at a high rate of speed.

"The cops are rather officious in this neighborhood," he said, speaking from a long and bitter experience.

"Won't arrest me," said Johns.

"Why not?"

"Know too much," answered the great man; and that was all the explanation Austin ever obtained of a phenomenon which long continued to excite his astonishment.

A little before eleven they turned in at the school gates between clumps of drooping rhododendron. The school buildings were high and ugly, but the lawn was beginning to turn green, and beyond the lawn the waters of the Sound were very blue, and at the very edge of the water Austin saw the little white cottage that was to be his home—his, and perhaps Susie's. His spirits rose to the adventure.

"Humph!" said Mr. Johns. "If I were about to address fifty giggling girls I should be nervous."

"They won't giggle," answered Austin, almost grimly.

They were met in the hall by Miss Curtis, a little gray-haired woman who, having been chosen the school secretary for her fitness as a subordinate, had been suffering tortures during the last weeks, owing to the number

of decisions that had been forced upon her since Mrs. Bevans's death.

"Oh," she cried, with relief in her tone, "is this Mr. Bevans?" and she held out her hand to Johns.

"What, you don't remember me, Miss Curtis?" said he. "My name is Johns."

Miss Curtis was overcome at her stupidity in forgetting the face of one of the school's most influential patrons. "But the fact is, Mr. Johns," she explained, "we *are* expecting Mr. Austin Bevans this morning, and my head was full of that."

"And I've brought him," said Johns. "This is Mr. Bevans."

Miss Curtis looked at Austin and gave a low cry. "Good heavens!" was all she could think of to say.

Austin saw that it was time to assert his authority. He spoke firmly. "I should like to speak a few words to the school—pupils and teachers both. Will you call them together."

"But they are in classes," stammered Miss Curtis.

"They must be taken out of them."

"Of course, of course," murmured Miss Curtis, experiencing once again the joy of being under orders. "Please wait a moment

in the office, and I'll assemble them in the great hall." She ushered them into a little room, and hurried away.

"Ha!" said Johns, when they were alone. "Going to be a tyrant, eh?"

"Most people like orders better when they're clear," said Austin.

Johns nodded. "Young man," he said, "you have some very sound ideas."

In the mean time, Miss Curtis, breathless and flustered, rushed into the geometry class. A fat girl in a navy blouse was at the blackboard (thinking, not why one side of a triangle was shorter than the sum of the other two sides, but rather, why it was that any one should torture her to give her reasons for believing so obvious a fact) when Miss Curtis beckoned away the teacher and closed the door behind them both.

"Oh," she cried, "the most extraordinary thing has happened! There's a young man down-stairs who looks like a god and says he owns this school."

Miss Hayes, who looked rather like a worn middle-aged Diana herself, smiled at her friend's excitement. She was Ph.D. in mathematics and had always been Mrs. Bevans's right hand—so much so that most people had expected that the school

would be left to her. Nevertheless, she laughed.

"You wouldn't laugh if you had seen him," Miss Curtis went on. "He's just the kind of young man who ought never to be allowed to enter a girls' school at all. He's—he's unsettling; he's *beautiful*," she added, as if nothing could be wickeder than that.

"Well, if he owns the school we can't keep him out," said Miss Hayes, growing grave in deference to her friend's obvious distress. "You're sure he really is Mr. Bevans?"

Miss Curtis sighed. "Oh, I'm afraid there's no doubt about that. Mr. Johns, the little princess's grandfather, brought him. And the worst of it is he's going to break up the whole morning's work. He wants us all assembled so that he can address us."

"I'll attend to it at once," said Miss Hayes.

A thrill of the wildest excitement ran through the school at the news that the new owner was actually in the building. They knew, of course, that their school had been inherited by a male relation of Mrs. Bevans, and some of them had even got hold of a rumor that he was in the automobile business. But there are all kinds of ways of being connected with this great industry, and two opposing theories had developed in the

school—one, that the new owner was a rich old man who wouldn't be bothered and meant to close the school immediately, and all the girls were to be shipped home at once and would never work again, because, of course, their parents couldn't get them into other schools at this late date, and, my dear, isn't it too *divine!* The other, that he was just a day laborer who couldn't even read and write, and what is he going to do with a girls' school, my dear, I ask *you?* The whole school had gone through the name of Bevans in the telephone-book, from Abimelech Bevans, an upholsterer in West End Avenue, to Zachary, who did a business in wines and cigars on the Bowery, without discovering anything, since Austin's telephone was under David's name.

As soon as every one, with much laughing and shuffling of feet, was gathered in the assembly-room—a large room shaped like an amphitheater, Miss Curtis summoned Austin and Mr. Johns. As they entered Austin said to her:

"Say a word or two to introduce me."

Miss Curtis wrung her hands. "Oh, I can't, Mr. Bevans. I never have." But as the two men had firmly sat down, leaving her standing alone, she began in a voice

almost inaudible: "Girls, it is a great pleasure to leave our classes"—the girls giggled, and she changed the sentence—"I mean it will be a great pleasure to you to know that you are to hear a few words—or more—from our new principal, Mr. Bevans."

Austin stood up.

Now every girl in the audience, except Mr. Johns's granddaughter, had supposed that Mr. Johns was the man. He certainly looked more like what a new principal should be. In spite of the optimism of youth, no girl really thought that Fate was going to send her a schoolmaster of the physical appearance of Austin, and so when he rose, an "oh" went up from the entire audience, like the exclamation with which a holiday crowd greets a rocket.

He stood silent a moment and then began, easily: "First I want to assure you all that nothing is going to be changed, I hope, so far as our staff and our students are concerned. I should not wish to change what my aunt—" He passed into a restrained but moving eulogy of his aunt Sophy. Miss Curtis wiped her eyes.

But praise of an old lady he had hardly seen a dozen times in his life did not take all

Austin's attention, and it was during this part of his speech that his eyes began to rove critically over his audience. They were a very nice-looking group of girls, he thought, some positively handsome; it would not be out of the question to teach them charm. His eye fell on a fat, red-faced girl chewing something rhythmically. Should he allow her to stay? Could she be made to do him credit? Yes, fat people had a peculiar charm all their own. He must not be narrow.

"— whose mind thought out, whose heart warmed, whose will achieved this institution," he was saying, when, glancing a little farther along the line, his eyes met another pair of eyes lifted to his with such an expression of adoration that he instantly lost his place. They were wonderful eyes, soft, dark, and large as pansies, set in a lovely little face turned up to him with the look of a worshiper to a saint. It was only for a second, of course. Austin wrenched away his eyes and managed to go on with what he was saying, just as if nothing momentous had happened.

But, he went on to say, there was one point in which it seemed to him all schools failed in their duty. It was the duty of a school not only to train the mind, but to

fit for life—to make its pupils happy, useful, well-developed people—in other words, to fit them not only for intellectual achievements, but for their human relations.

And here, with something of a bound, he passed on to the question of charm. What was charm? (The whole school sat up.) It was first of all an affair of the soul—of the very core of the being, but it was also an affair of expressing that soul outwardly, of voice, of manner, of bearing. Truths expressed in a rasping voice were at a disadvantage, and, judging by the sounds he heard as he came down the corridor, he feared a good many truths were put at that disadvantage by members of the school. Well, he simply did not intend his pupils to go through life with any such handicap as that, every time they opened their mouths. They needn't think he was going to have them taught elocution in the sense of wasting time repeating Anthony's speech—no indeed, it was every-day speech he was after —every-day life. He knew colleges that taught men to write splendid briefs about municipal ownership which did not trouble to teach them to write a decent note. That was the trouble with colleges. He did not mean his girls to fall into that error. While

keeping up the highest intellectual standards for which the school was known, he hoped to teach his pupils to be women of the world in the best sense—charming women of the world. "You'll find it," he added, with his first smile, "a very useful thing to be."

He withdrew, leaving behind such a tumult of applause and discussion as the assembly-room had never heard before. Miss Curtis, still emotionally stirred, followed him to the office.

"Oh, Mr. Bevans," she said, "that did touch us all—what you said about your dear aunt. It was beautiful—beautiful."

Mr. Bevans was immensely gratified that Miss Curtis liked it, but did she know where Mr. Johns was, as he had business in town. As a matter of fact, he had not as yet notified the automobile company that he had ceased to be their salesman.

"I think Mr. Johns must have stopped to speak to the little princess."

"To the what?" said Austin.

"To his little granddaughter—Elise Benedotti. You know his daughter married, most unhappily, an Italian prince—both dead—the child—a sweet child— I'll go and see."

Miss Curtis hurried away, still murmuring information.

Could it have been a princess who had looked at him with that expression? Austin caught himself wondering. Then he thought: "How ridiculous! What difference does it make who she is—one of my pupils—that's all."

The door opened and a tall, angular woman entered.

"I'm Miss Hayes, Mr. Bevans," she said, in a brisk, pleasant, almost too competent voice. "I teach mathematics. I think it's more honest to tell you I'm not a bit in sympathy with a great deal that you said this morning. You want them taught to please—the poor dears. They're too eager to please as it is—women, I mean."

"Not *all*," said Austin, and then wished he hadn't, for she laughed, understanding him quickly.

"I couldn't assist in any such plan. This continual thinking about their charms holds women back so, and—yes—even from your point of view—makes them less charming."

"You mean you are not sufficiently in sympathy to stay with us?" said Austin, firmly.

She smiled, but not triumphantly. "I have a three years' contract," she answered.

Austin looked at her. He thought she would be a determined, but not a dangerous

opponent. At this point Miss Curtis came fluttering back.

"Oh, Mr. Bevans," she began, "won't you please say just a word to poor Sally Boyd—one of our dearest girls? She's in tears because she thinks you mean to turn her out, that no one could ever make a woman of the world of her. She says she saw you look at her with disgust—her own word. She's rather plump, it's true, but one of the kindest natures—"

"Ask her to come in," said Austin. He had not anticipated an interview with a pupil so soon, but he was not one to turn back at the call of duty.

"Awkward, when they take us literally, isn't it?" said Miss Hayes. Austin regarded her coldly. He saw he would have trouble with this woman.

Miss Curtis returned presently, bringing with her Sally, who was pulling down her navy blouse in the hope of lengthening the lines of her figure. She was no longer crying—only sniffling a little. Austin found himself confronted with a new problem—what he should call his pupils. He had to make a decision.

"How do you do, Sally?" he said, quite paternally.

Encouraged by his kind manner, Sally broke out: "Oh, Mr. Bevans, I agreed with every word you said, but I don't see how I ever can be made into a charming woman of the world—you know I can't, and so I think I'd just better go away and not be a blot on the school."

"Sally," said Austin, and this time he spoke with great severity, "you must understand that that is entirely a question for me to decide. I intend to retain you as a pupil. When in my opinion you become a blot, you will hear from me. Until then confine your attention to matters within your comprehension. You can be made anything I decide to make you. That will do."

Immensely relieved and hopelessly intimidated, Sally withdrew, and was swallowed up at the door by a questioning group whose voices, all talking at once, could be heard moving away down the corridor.

Presently the door opened and Mr. Johns entered, but, to Austin's profound disappointment, entered alone. "Ready to go?" he demanded, briskly.

"Quite," answered Bevans, "only, I thought you would want to see your granddaughter."

"Oh, I've seen her," said Johns. "Was

bringing her in here to speak to you, but her room-mate, Sally Boyd, gave such a terrifying account of you that she lost heart and ran away."

Austin felt less satisfied with his newly acquired manner. He held out his hand to Miss Curtis.

"Oh, Mr. Bevans," she began, as if she were about to ask some personal favor, "might we—would you be so very kind—as to send us out a bookkeeper once a week? Our old one has left, and, oh, dear me! I don't understand accounts and—"

"I'll send you out a young man from the bank," said Mr. Johns.

"A very steady one, please, Mr. Johns," said Miss Curtis, with unusual firmness, "because, you know, the school bookkeeper gives the seniors individual instruction once a week—at a small salary."

"Well, if any one can teach my granddaughter to keep accounts, he ought to have a halo, not a salary. Come along, Bevans."

"You'll see that he's steady?" Miss Curtis pleaded, following them to the hall door.

"All my young men are steady," grunted Mr. Johns, getting heavily into the car, and added, under his breath, "What does she think a bank is?"

Austin did not reply, for his attention had been completely distracted by a sight which had escaped Mr. Johns's notice. As they drove down the avenue toward the gate, a slim little figure suddenly rose on a rock at some distance and waved. Turning completely round in the motor, Austin gazed again upon the velvet softness of those eyes. As he did so, she kissed her hand—doubtless to her grandfather, who fortunately continued to look in the opposite direction.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he was saying. "I'll lend you five thousand if within a month Elise notifies me that she has given up the college idea."

"That's too easy."

"Ha! You think so, do you? She's awfully self-willed."

Self-willed! Austin reflected. With those eyes!

CHAPTER III

DURING Mrs. Bevans's lifetime it had been against the rules for the girls—even those with families in the neighborhood—to go home for Sunday. So it was still, but under Miss Curtis's milder reign many girls attempted it, and some actually succeeded.

The day after Austin's visit, which was a Saturday, Sally Boyd, whose parents had a large country place near by, went home and took Elise with her. They felt they needed the uninterrupted leisure of twenty-four hours in order properly to discuss the recent events of school life.

The Boyd family consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Boyd and two children—George and Sally. George, the elder of the two, was employed in Mr. Johns's bank, and had, ever since he was a little boy, worshiped Elise—a devotion which had become an unexciting, but not an unsatisfactory, part of her every-day life. When things went badly with her and the world seemed hostile, she often caught

herself murmuring, "Well, anyhow, George worships me"; and, so undiscriminating is human egotism, that she took great comfort in this thought, although she attached but little importance in general to George's opinion.

Mr. Boyd was a tall, heavy man, not so good tempered as fat people are supposed to be. Both George and Sally took after him physically; indeed, Mrs. Boyd, who was pretty and slight, seemed like a visitor in her own family, or like a captured fairy who has assumed obligations toward her jailers. She was at heart a strangely unmaternal person, but sympathetic, and so interested —not to say curious—about all lives, her children's among others, that she really knew and understood more about them than many better parents.

"Well," she said, eagerly, as the five sat down to dinner that evening, "have you seen your new headmaster yet, and, if so, what's he like?" She would have been just as much interested in the experience of total strangers, but the girls did not know that.

They, on the other hand, were struggling with the problem that assails all young people, business men, indeed any one who is at

once a member of a family and involved in outside interests. With every wish to be friendly and chatty, they did not want to submit their difficulties to the arbitration of family discussion until they were sure it couldn't do any harm. Sally could not be quite certain whether or not she were in love with Austin, and until she settled that point for herself she did not really want any parental counsel. So now, in answer to her mother's question, she dropped a veil like a mask over her open countenance and replied that Mr. Bevans seemed to be "all right."

This wouldn't do for Mrs. Boyd at all. "But describe him, describe him," she said. She would have been content to be a bed-ridden invalid for the rest of her life if every one she knew would have contracted to come and give her every detail of his own adventures. "Is he young or old?"

"He's about twenty-five," said Sally, reluctantly.

"What?" said her brother, starting out of a dreamy contemplation of Elise.

"He's older than that," said Elise.

"I should hope so," said George.

"He's twenty-eight," Elise went on.

"What?" cried George again.

"Why, that's an extraordinary thing, isn't it?" said Mr. Boyd, looking hard at his wife down the length of the table, as if no one would understand what he was trying to convey by the look.

Mrs. Boyd dived to the essential. "Is he nice-looking?" she asked.

At this the faces of the two girls became like carved stone, and at last Sally dropped a casual, "Why, yes," as much as to say, if you are interested in that sort of thing, I suppose you might think so.

"How perfectly wonderful!" said Mrs. Boyd. "You must describe him to me."

The Sphinxlike quality in Sally did not go very deep, and she answered, eagerly:

"Well, I think he looks like the picture of Tristram that hangs in the back hall."

"Oh, that horrid picture!" said Elise. "Mr. Bevans is so much more virile-looking."

"I mean if it had blue eyes and a better figure," said Sally.

"Really, mother," cried George, "do you think Sally ought to talk about a schoolmaster's figure and eyes? She ought not know he has them."

"Wouldn't be much use as a teacher if he hadn't," answered Sally.

"Do you mean that the fellow is hand-

some?" inquired George in the same tone Miss Curtis had used, as if it were a contemptible quality for a man to possess. Sally began to giggle, but Elise, turning fully to George and fixing her eyes on his, replied, clearly:

"He is the handsomest man I ever saw."

"How outrageous!" said George.

"How amusing!" said his mother.

"Rather an unusual situation," said his father, with another glance.

"Well," said George in a loud tone, rather modeled on Mr. Johns's own, "I hope, mother, you don't intend to allow it."

"To allow Mr. Bevans to be so handsome, George?" inquired his mother, mildly.

"To allow Sally to stay in such a place. You ought to take her away—you ought to warn Mr. Johns."

"My grandfather?" said Elise, innocently. "Oh, grandfather is crazy about Mr. Bevans. It was he who brought him up in his car yesterday. I don't know when I've seen him so nice to any younger man."

This piece of information was, as it was perhaps intended to be, the last straw. George was afraid of Mr. Johns, not only because he shouted and grunted, not only

because he was at the head of the bank, not only because he controlled Elise's destiny, but because he made him, George, seem like a fool. The very way in which he shouted, "Ha, George!" on seeing him, as if arrest in the king's name was about to follow, drove every sensible idea out of George's mind. The notion, therefore, that this adventurous schoolmaster, this Tristram with blue eyes, was not only free of this terror, but actually contrived to make the great man motor him about the country, was simply intolerable.

"It's out of the question," he said, trying to rouse his parents to some sense of their responsibilities. "It can't be allowed. It ought to be against the law for a man under thirty to own a girls' school—particularly if he is handsome."

"Wouldn't it be amusing," said Mrs. Boyd, "to watch a jury deciding how handsome a man had to be in order to disqualify him."

"It's immoral," announced George.

"George always thinks that anything that doesn't suit him is immoral."

"All nice men do, my dear," said her mother. But in her heart she was a little disturbed, for she really wanted her son,

like the industrious apprentice, to marry his employer's heir, and she was aware that romantic currents were setting strongly in the opposite direction.

The evening was given over to diplomatic conferences—George with his parents, telling them what they ought to do, say, and fear; George with the girls, trying under the guise of interest to extract information to be used against them, and not getting very far; Mrs. Boyd with the girls, same object and better success; the girls with each other, deciding to be more masklike in the future; and finally, Mr. and Mrs. Boyd, deciding that Mrs. Boyd had better go and look the situation over as soon as the new master was established.

In the course of the evening Elise quarreled with George—at least as much as one can quarrel with a person who believes that nothing said or done can change a relation in the least. Their quarrels always took about the same course. Elise in a moment of candor told George how she really felt toward him; George grew sulky and said if she felt like that they had better not see each other any more. Elise replied that perhaps that would be best. George would then withdraw for a period of a few hours.

At the end of that time he would return, having recovered his temper, and advance the theory that Elise had been angry. Elise would answer that she certainly had. George would then laugh, and say, as one old and wise in the ways of women, "I knew you didn't mean what you said." Elise would then assure him that she had meant every word—although she would not have said it if she hadn't been cross. This statement George always took as a huge joke—a feminine whimsy—a charming method of saving her face—and so settled back into his old attitude.

This cycle had been run through by the time they parted on Monday morning.

"It's because I love you so much, Elise," he said, as he bade her good-by. "I want to guard you from him—to be near you and watch over you."

The last words were heard by Sally, who answered: "You might come and give a course in morals, George—you're so strong on morals."

George couldn't think of anything better than, "One of you could learn manners with advantage." He saw them giggling with their heads together as they drove away; and, turning, he observed to his mother that

Sally was at a very unattractive period of her development.

On their return to school the girls found that the excitement, far from abating, was increasing every hour. Trunks and cleaning-women had been seen at the white cottage. All the windows in the school-buildings which overlooked the cottage were crowded at all hours, and girls, even the most unpopular, who had rooms on that side of the house, could be sure of an unceasing flow of visitors.

Then came a late afternoon, two days later, when a geranium-colored car glided unannounced up the drive and stopped in front of the cottage door. That evening at supper the whole school was like a regiment on dress parade—every curl in place, every finger manicured. But nothing happened.

Toward the end of an anxious meal, Sally, stirred to action by a whispered word passed to her round the table, inquired of Miss Hayes, who sat next to her, whether Mr. Bevans wasn't very late for supper.

Miss Hayes had been long enough a teacher to be aware of the tense expectation with which the whole school had been watching the door, but she was tactful enough to answer, casually:

"Oh, Mr. Bevans doesn't eat at the school. He has his own cook at the cottage."

The girls looked at one another blankly. They had never imagined such a calamity. They had assumed that in taking over the school he would do exactly as his aunt had done.

An even more alarming possibility now presented itself. "I suppose," said Sally, faintly, "that he'll take the Sacred Literature course to-morrow morning, won't he?"

Miss Hayes was gathering the room together with her eyes, preparatory to making the move, and her attention appeared to be on that as she answered:

"No, Mr. Bevans isn't going to do any teaching at all. Miss Simmons will go on with the Sacred Literature course."

Fifteen buncoed seniors stared at one another in horror. At the beginning of the term they had all elected the stupidest course in the whole school—and, as one of them remarked, that was saying a mouthful —on the confident assumption that the nephew would take up the aunt's work. Miss Hayes's cool announcement plunged them all into the deepest thought. Each, having resolved to give up the course, was inventing a plausible reason for dropping it.

As every biologist knows, the nest-making instinct is not wholly absent in the male, and Austin derived the keenest pleasure from settling himself and his few belongings in the white cottage at the edge of the water. The process of settling consisted largely in trying Susie's beautiful, long, brown photograph in different positions. His own dressing-table seemed too intimate, his sitting-room mantelpiece too remote, and he finally decided on the desk in his study, where visiting parents, looking upon it, might understand that he was practically an engaged man.

Though he had taken over the school primarily with the object of making enough money to marry Susie, having taken it over, he desired burningly to do the right thing by his pupils. It had always seemed to him tragic the way the happiness of women in this world depended on their possession of charm. He saw that Miss Hayes and people of her sort were trying to reorganize all human life, so that charm would not be such a preponderating factor. His own ambitions were much less vast; he simply wanted to help the little group under his charge to the attainment of as much of the precious quality as was possible. About this he was extremely serious.

Indeed, exactly the same quality that had made him a good automobile salesman now made him a good school principal—that is, a profound and conscientious attention to detail. His former employers had sometimes thought he carried this tiresomely far, but, now that he was his own boss, he could carry it as far as he liked. It was this attention to detail that from the first made Miss Curtis worship him. She, too, was conscientious, so that she suffered intensely when things went wrong, but so unexecutive that she never knew how to get them right. Mrs. Bevans had been a little slack at times—had pretended that the roof really wasn't leaking and that the furnace-man wasn't drunk. But Austin was on the roof instantly, and had taken the furnace-man to the priest to sign the pledge almost before he was sober enough to know what he was doing.

Austin never confided to Miss Curtis how the furnace-man explained his bad habits, as the geranium-colored car bore him toward the priest's house. "It's this working for women gets me," he said. "It's always so polite they are, and yet always after you."

The first academic problem to present itself was the case of the course in Sacred

Literature. Miss Curtis simply couldn't understand it.

"The strangest thing, Mr. Bevans," she said. "All fifteen of the seniors elected it this term—a thing that never happened even when your dear aunt was giving it. Miss Simmons was so flattered. She regarded it naturally enough as a tribute to her. And now all of them—all but one, at least—want to drop it. We can't understand it."

"Why do they want to drop it?"

"All for different reasons, and they seem such good reasons, too. One girl finds it conflicts with a course her parents particularly want her to take, and one thinks it is sacrilegious to treat the Bible as if it were literature, and one says— Eleanor Hayes, what are you laughing at?"

"I'm laughing," said Miss Hayes, who had just entered the conference, "at the unexpected powers of invention that exist in our senior class."

Miss Curtis was shocked. "You mean you don't believe them?" she asked.

"Of course I don't," said Miss Hayes. "They elected the course because they assumed Mr. Bevans was going to give it, and they are dropping it because they find he isn't."

Austin decided to interview them himself, in conjunction with Miss Curtis. He derived a great deal of amusement and some information in the process. They came to him—fourteen of them—so candid, so sincere, so willing to be reasonable and meet him halfway. They told their ridiculous stories as if only he, out of all the world, would really understand them. He was particularly impressed by the story of one girl—Helen Doughty by name—who feared that her belief would be undermined by certain doctrinal questions that had come up in connection with the Book of Job.

When they had all finished Austin got up with his hands in his pockets and said:

"Oh, come now, really, girls, this sort of thing won't do. You'll all take the course you elected, and that's an end of it. But while we are on the subject, let me give you a word of advice about trying to put something like this over. Don't be so terribly sincere and candid and reasonable, and, above all, don't be so glib. Do remember that the person you're talking to has probably tried to put something over in his time, and tried to do it by being just as candid and sincere and reasonable as all of you are. Every one ought to have a course in listening to an

office-boy trying to get off to a ball-game. There's a look of almost divine innocence that comes over his face that, once seen, is never forgotten. It's been on every one of your faces for the last ten minutes."

There was a pause, and then Sally Boyd said, in the tone of one who had been wounded almost beyond bearing, "You don't mean that you don't believe us, Mr. Bevans?"

And Miss Curtis at his elbow whispered, "Oh, don't say that you don't—please, please!"

"Sally," said Austin, "the rational part of me, to which you have all addressed your remarks exclusively, knows there isn't a joint in your logical statement. But the subsconscious part of me knows that we haven't yet touched on the real reason why you want to get out of the course, whatever that reason may be."

There was another pause, and then the girls nearest the door began to file quietly out. Miss Curtis was deeply distressed. She felt she had witnessed a painful, an almost indecent scene.

"I know you didn't mean it, Mr. Bevans," she said, "but I'm afraid the girls got the idea that you didn't quite believe their word,

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He was particularly impressed by the story of one girl who feared that her belief would be undermined by certain doctrinal questions that had come up in connection with the Book of Job.

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and that is such a mistake with these young, sensitive souls."

"Who was the one senior who didn't appear?"

"Elise Benedotti."

Of course he had known it was she.

On Saturday morning Mr. Johns's accountant was to arrive. Austin was no expert, but when Miss Curtis brought him the books he saw that they were in sad disorder. Perhaps the tragedy of Miss Curtis's life was mitigated by the ease with which one sorrow drove out another. She had now ceased entirely to mourn over the perfidy of the seniors in order to give herself up more completely to remorse at the condition to which, in a few weeks, she had reduced the books. "Only, of course, I'm not a bookkeeper," she said, as if this were in some way immensely to her credit. Austin, who didn't consider any disability a matter of pride, had to confess that he wasn't, either.

"I'll look at them," he said; "and send that bookkeeper down to the cottage the very instant he arrives, and see that we're not interrupted."

"No, indeed," said Miss Curtis, who would have promised anything, possible or impossible.

But Miss Hayes was made of sterner stuff. "But I'm afraid you'll have to be interrupted, Mr. Bevans," she put in. "Saturday is a favorite day with parents, and several of them are coming this morning."

"Oh, parents!" said Austin, lightly. "I can't allow them to waste my time. Miss Curtis will interview them, as usual."

Miss Curtis wrung her hands. "I can't, I really can't, Mr. Bevans," she cried. "They make me feel so guilty—especially that horrid Mrs. McLane, who scolds about everything. Not parents — anything but parents."

"Why, it's quite simple, Miss Curtis," said Austin, soothingly. "All you have to say is, 'Your daughter is an unusual girl, but then we did not expect your child to be commonplace.' That's all."

Miss Hayes laughed. "It's a good phrase, Mr. Bevans," she said, "but I'm afraid you'll have to speak it yourself. Parents regard it as their inalienable right to talk over their problems with the head of the school. You will lose valuable pupils if you refuse."

Austin, knowing that she was right, yielded, only demanding the letter-files con-

taining the correspondence of any parent known to be due.

But almost at once he regretted his decision; it would have been wiser, he thought, to have remained remote, inaccessible even to parents; to have constituted himself that mysterious entity which no business should be without, which is vaguely referred to by powerless subordinates as "he." Austin suddenly saw this so clearly that he leaped to his feet, meaning to run over to the school and notify Miss Curtis of his decision, but as he opened his own front door he was confronted by a parent.

She was a minute, pretty person, with pearl earrings, a dotted veil, and neat, fashionable clothes. She said, firmly:

"I want to see Mr. Bevans."

"I am he," said Austin. (He owed it to Mrs. Rolles that he did not say "him.")

The little lady looked at him and began to laugh. "Good gracious!" she said. "I'm awfully sorry, but I did take you for the footman—that's a compliment, you know, now that people go in for these wonderful footmen. Don't you think perhaps you missed your vocation?"

Austin saw immediately that he could not let any parent take this tone with him. "I

cannot flatter myself, madam," he said, "that you did me the honor to visit me in order to discuss my vocation."

"Bless me," said she, "you talk to me as if I were a pupil, not a parent! I don't wonder the girls are afraid of you."

"You have a daughter at this school?" asked Austin. He thought of adding, "In one of the younger classes, I'm sure," but decided that she did not deserve it.

"Yes, I am Mrs. Boyd, the mother of that dear, fat Sally—I, who have never had even to exercise in order to keep thin."

Finding her becoming more respectful, he opened the study door and ushered her in. She turned on the threshold and asked, impulsively:

"But how did you happen to become a schoolmaster?"

"It was Sally we were to discuss," he said.

"Ah yes," said his visitor, as if she had not been now twice reproved. "So we were." She sank into a chair and loosened her furs. She was thinking that he really was like the picture of Tristram in the back hall, only that to her, as to the Queen of Sheba on a not too-dissimilar occasion, the half had not been told. "My poor child," she went on, "in spite of her solid exterior,

is of a very sensitive nature. She is unusually—"

Austin thought the moment had come for the formula, "We should not expect your child to be commonplace, Mrs. Boyd."

It was just what she needed. She brightened visibly. "Oh, how nice of you to say that!" she said. "And you've put your finger on the difficulty. Poor Sally has all my temperament, but unfortunately she hasn't my—she hasn't my—"

She looked at him wistfully, obviously expecting him to say something equivalent to "your beauty," but the hard-hearted creature remained patiently silent. Her annoyance was natural.

"After all," she said, "I believe that you're nothing but a schoolmaster."

"That's all," he answered, "as far as my pupils and their parents are concerned."

She stood up, visibly sulking. The interview which had promised so much entertainment had really turned out not much more interesting than her interviews with old Mrs. Bevans used to be. She thought she would try him on the side of his professional pride.

"My son—my son George—thinks I ought to take Sally away."

"I do not think I have the pleasure of your son George's acquaintance."

"Oh, it's not personal—only you know it is rather unusual for a man of your age—and, may I say, appearance—"

"Since you ask me," said Austin, "I should think it better taste not to."

"Well, we'll put it all on the score of age, then," she replied, dryly. "But you know you are rather young to run a girls' school."

"It's a question of character, not age," answered Austin. "I've known some old men I should not care to intrust my school to."

"Oh, *old* men!" exclaimed his visitor, as if she could have written a volume on the subject. There was a pause after this which at first seemed to have come of itself, but was really occasioned by the fact that Austin's eyes had suddenly fallen upon a most unexpected object upon his desk, and he was engaged in wondering how long it had been there. It was a crisp, white gardenia in a slender vase. His concentrated gaze directed hers to the same spot.

"What," she cried, "have you greenhouses? Or no—an admiring pupil—a flower on teacher's desk—an offering at the shrine. Oh no, I don't think I can take Sally away,

after all. It's too amusing." She went out, laughing, almost before Austin had roused himself enough to open the door for her.

He drew a long breath. "I hope there won't be any more like that—so early in the morning," he thought; and as if in answer to his wish, a stout, comfortable old lady was ushered in—an old lady with a tendency to chuckle, particularly at her own jokes.

"I've just come to wish you good luck," she said. "I knew your aunt well. Dear Sophy. I'm glad she left the school to you and not to Miss Hayes—"

"Miss Hayes!" cried Austin, to whom this was a new idea.

"Yes, that was her plan. She thought you were too young, Mr. Bevans, and if you won't mind my saying it—too handsome. I couldn't see that youth and beauty ever were a disadvantage to any one, but Sophy thought the girls would be sentimental about you. Well, they're bound to be sentimental about some one, for it's their nature. Better their schoolmaster than a second-rate actor. My Mabel remembers every word you say. She never remembered anything Sophy said. Oh, you'll lose some pupils. That Mrs. McLane is on her way over now to remove her girl. She says it's improper, but she

always was abusing the school, and you'll do just as well without her."

But Austin did not want to lose any of his pupils. "If there's any weeding out to be done," he thought, when he was left alone, "I'll do it myself." Besides, he knew how easily at this moment of the school's life a general stampede could be started. No, he didn't want to lose the McLane child, however troublesome she was.

A few minutes later Mrs. McLane swept in—a tall woman, befeathered, bejeweled, and rustling with the richest fabrics.

"Can this be Mr. Bevans?" she asked, in the same tone, but not at all with the same flattering intention, with which Faust inquired about the face that launched a thousand ships.

"Ah, Mrs. McLane, isn't it?" said Austin, almost chattily. "I was hoping you might drop in to say good-by. We shall miss you and—and" (he just glanced at a letter)—"and Muriel very much."

"Miss us? I don't understand. Is my daughter no longer an acceptable pupil at the Bevans School?" asked Mrs. McLane, portentously.

"Very acceptable, except for your dissatisfaction with the school."

"I never felt any dissatisfaction," she said.

Austin was good-humoredly airy. "My dear lady," he said, "you forget. On the second and seventh of last January you wrote my aunt that you intended to remove her. On the eighteenth of this month you said that you had never known an institution so deficient—"

Mrs. McLane waved a large gloved hand. "I am open, candid, Mr. Bevans, perhaps over-critical, but I have the best interests of this school at heart. I should never dream of removing my daughter."

Austin shook his head. "Isn't it too bad I should have misunderstood you," he said. "I'm afraid that my telegram has gone to Mr. McFadden—Mr. Lemuel V. McFadden, you know, the cattle king." (He thought the name did credit to his imagination.) "Such an interesting daughter, too, but then we should not expect a McLane to be commonplace."

"Ah, you have always understood her here," said Mrs. McLane. "I can never find another school that will."

"Too bad she has to go," murmured Austin. He let her plead vainly until a new visitor was announced, and then very graciously yielded.

The new-comer was Mr. Browning, the writing-master, a pale, bearded man, who came to complain that the young ladies did not take his course seriously. "I wish you'd speak to them, Mr. Bevans, especially to that little Italian girl; she's the worst; she is a very lawless element in this school."

"Lawless?" cried Austin.

"Yes, sir, lawless. Don't be deceived by that gentle manner. She has great influence with her companions, and she twists Miss Hayes round her finger. And she writes a very bad hand."

"I'll see to it," said Austin.

The writing-master made way for a parent —male, this time. Mr. Doughty, severe and middle-aged.

"I wish to see Mr. Bevans."

"I am Mr. Bevans."

"The head of this school?"

"Yes."

Mr. Doughty bowed with the manner of a man who had seen many strange things in his time. "I suppose I may smoke," he said, biting off the end of his cigar.

"No," said Austin. "I'm sorry, but you may not. I never allow smoking in my office in the morning." It was a rule he

had made upon the spur of the moment, but it had just the right effect upon Doughty, who replaced his cigar hastily in his pocket with a docility quite unusual in him.

"I came to speak to you about Helen," he began.

"Ah, Helen," said Austin, as if Helen's problems had oddly enough been the last thought in his mind.

"My daughter," observed Mr. Doughty, "is in many ways a remarkable girl—"

"Well, Mr. Doughty," said Austin, genially, "we should not expect your child to be commonplace."

Mr. Doughty raised a deprecating hand, although, clearly, the remark was not distasteful to him. "No," he said, "you are wrong. What little success I have had in life has been due to luck, not to ability. Take, for example, my acquiring control of the C. T. & W.—"

"How interesting!" murmured Austin, at a time which his sound commercial training told him was the right moment. But he was thinking: a gardenia is not a common, accidental flower which might be picked by the cook's child out on a ramble. A gardenia is a deliberate, artificial, expensive, troublesome— He raised it and smelled the delicious

perfume. Why, he wondered, did it make him think of the little princess? Did she wear them? Or was it that the smooth whiteness of her skin—

He broke off, for the time had come to murmur again, "How interesting!"

"Yes, it was as simple as that," said Mr. Doughty. In the excitement of his narrative he had taken out his cigar again, but on receiving a severe look from Austin he hastily replaced it. "I beg your pardon," he said, and Austin forgave him with a kindly glance. "I came to speak about Helen. She tells me the school no longer prepares for college. That is a great disappointment, Mr. Bevans. I wish Helen to go to college. If she cannot be prepared here, I must send her elsewhere." He paused to be pleaded with.

"The school will miss Helen very much," said Austin, making a faint pretense of rising, as if the interview were over. It wasn't, for Mr. Doughty settled back in his chair.

"Helen," he said, "is just the type to profit by a college education."

"I should have said exactly the opposite," answered Austin.

"I consider her intellectual equipment far above the average, though, of course," he

added, as one to whom such a thing had never so far happened, "I may be wrong."

"You are not wrong," said her schoolmaster. "She is far above the average—especially in her originality," and he thought of her wonderful story about the Book of Job—"and it is for that reason I do not want to see her run into a mold. What is college education designed for, Mr. Doughty? —the average person—worse than that—the average boy. It standardizes. Now I should like to see Helen study with special masters who would bring out her special powers."

He sketched a wonderful curriculum for her. Mr. Doughty owned he had never considered the matter from this point of view; he had simply assumed that colleges gave the best education at present available. Austin smiled sadly and shook his head at such colossal ignorance, seeming to indicate that his life would be easier if he could submit all parents to an elementary course in the purposes of education. The great man left his study a complete convert to the Bevans theories.

As the door shut behind him, Austin snapped his fingers.

"Bring on more parents," he said, boastfully.

But Fate was not so kind to him. An instant later his aunt's old servant put her head in at the door to say:

"'Tis the little princess, sir, would like a worrud with you."

Austin hesitated. This was against the rules—a good deal more against the rules than Mr. Doughty's innocent attempt to light a cigar. It was not only against the rules, but against his principles—he did not intend the girls to get into the habit of coming to his study. And yet he did want to speak to Elise about this question of her handwriting. While he was debating the matter with himself, his right hand stole out and, without any conscious mandate from its owner, it took the photograph of Susie in its silver frame, and laid it face downward in a drawer of the desk. Then he said to the servant:

"Let her come in."

The next instant she was standing timidly on the threshold. She was wearing a pale-blue sweater, and on it was pinned a crisp, white gardenia.

"May I speak to you, sir?" she just breathed.

It had never occurred to him that she would call him "sir," and for some reason it

unnerved him strangely, but his manner betrayed nothing of the kind.

"Yes, Elise," he said. "But I must say I don't like my mornings interrupted by any one but parents."

"But you know I have no parents, sir."

She approached and leaned her hand on his desk; in whiteness it compared favorably with the gardenia, but, unlike the flower, it was shaking. He looked up quickly—yes, the little princess was trembling from top to toe. There was something appealing in her doing a deed that frightened her so much. He wanted to ask her to sit down, but, knowing that a more pedagogic tone could be given to the interview if she stood and he remained seated, he didn't. He merely said, quite coldly:

"What was it you wished to speak to me about?"

"I want to change one of the courses I have elected, please, Mr. Bevans."

He looked up at her again. Was he to hear a fifteenth incredibly plausible story about Sacred Literature, and from her whom he had thought superior!

Her hand trembled more and more, but she said, firmly: "I want to take an extra English course instead of Sacred Literature."

"Sacred Literature is a pretty good thing to know something about," said Austin.

"It's the stupidest course in the school, sir."

"Then why did you elect it?" He looked straight at her, and she looked straight back again.

"Because I thought you were going to give it, sir," she answered.

The truth, being mighty, prevailed. The moment was distinctly Elise's. There was a silence of several seconds before he thought of the right thing to say.

"Why did you assume that I would make it more interesting than Miss Simmons does?"

She smiled, showing a flash of very small white teeth. "Anybody would, sir," she returned.

Austin made a grab at his professional manner as a man makes a grab at his hat in a high wind, and caught it in time.

"You must learn to take an interest in the subjects you study, irrespective of the teacher's personality, Elise," he said.

"I'll remember that — when I get to college."

"To college, Elise? Surely you know that neither I nor your grandfather approves of your going to college."

"Oh, Mr. Bevans, don't interfere with my going to college. I want to so much. You have to have degrees, nowadays, to do anything in the world, and school, even if you work hard, isn't the same. Miss Hayes says—"

"This is a question about which Miss Hayes and I disagree."

"Oh, I know," she wailed. "And it's so dreadful when the two people you respect most in the world disagree about what you ought to do."

Austin was silent. His self-confidence, which soared in the face of opposition, sank before praise. Why in thunder should this little girl respect him, and was he wise, was he even honest in the advice he was giving her? In his hesitation, almost unconsciously, he drew toward him the vase holding the gardenia, and slowly breathed in its intoxicating perfume. This was too much for the little princess. She drew back, grew slowly, conspicuously, splendidly crimson, and then, evidently feeling that the situation had passed far beyond her powers, she retreated hastily to the door.

But there, with her hand actually on the knob, she made a last stand.

"It isn't," she said, gently, "as if you and

grandfather could really change anything, you know. You just make it harder for me."

This was obviously rebellion, with however gentle a motion the red flag was waved. Austin sprang to his feet and approached her almost menacingly. "What do you mean by that?" he asked.

"I mean, I mean—" she began; but at this moment the door, against which she was lightly leaning the tip of her shoulder, was quickly opened from without, and she was precipitated into Austin's arms—or rather she was completely thrown off her balance and he, standing near her, could do no less than keep her on her feet. As a matter of cold fact, he did a little more; there was a second—an unnecessary second—when his hand remained about her shoulder. It seemed a very long second to the new-comer, who turned out to be Mr. Johns's accountant.

The new accountant was George Boyd.

Austin sprang to his feet and approached her almost menacingly. "What do you mean by that?" he asked.

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CHAPTER IV

IT would have been a great surprise to George, who had so long secretly loved Elise, to know that Mr. Johns secretly approved of his suit. Yet such was the case. No one has ever explained why it is that parents and guardians consider dull people such safe matrimonial investments for their young charges. Even granting the unsound assumption that dull people are more apt to be content with their own matrimonial fetters, they are certainly more apt to be the cause of discontent in others. Mr. Johns, who was bored to death by five minutes of George's society, believed that his granddaughter—not fond of being bored, either—would be happy to spend the rest of her life with him.

But of all this George was completely ignorant—indeed, he supposed that he was the last person Mr. Johns would tolerate as grandson-in-law, and so he believed that in coming to protect Elise in the immediate danger in which he feared she stood he was

sacrificing his future relation both with her and his employer.

It had been easily enough arranged. George happened to be in the room when Mr. Johns told the head bookkeeper to choose "a sensible young fellar and send him out to the Bevans School on Saturday." The daring, the adventurous, the chivalrous scheme of being that young fellar was born instantly in George's mind, and as he was on very good terms with the head bookkeeper he was able to persuade him that no one in the bank was steadier than himself.

He had taken his sister Sally into his confidence, and she had, of course, told the little princess, who was, therefore, at no loss to explain his sudden appearance in Mr. Bevans's study, but she cannot be said to have expected it, because at the moment she had totally forgotten that such a person as George Boyd existed.

"Look here," said Austin, angrily, "that's no way to come into a room. You nearly knocked this young lady down."

"Oh, it's no matter. I didn't mind what happened," said Elise, with a brilliant smile.

"I'm sorry," said the accountant, stiffly, "but of course I supposed that you were alone."

The note of reproof was so clear in his tone that Austin, who had already felt himself antagonistic to the new bookkeeper, now found himself decidedly irritated.

"And may I ask," he said, "why you assumed that I was alone?"

"I assumed it," began George, with the wild rush of a balky horse at a fence it doesn't mean to jump—"I assumed it because—" He stopped and began all over again. "I cannot associate myself with any institution without taking an interest in its welfare, and I must tell you—"

"Will you be so awfully good as to mind your own business?" said Austin. "There seems to be some misunderstanding. I hire you to run the books, not the school. If you don't like the way it's being done, you can always leave."

But the accountant had not so much liberty in this respect as Austin imagined.

Seeing the two men engaged in what for lack of a better word she called conversation, the little princess decided to escape before a worse thing happened to her, for she feared a second explosion on the part of George might involve her, too. She was softly opening the study door when Bevans stopped her.

"No, wait a moment," he said. "I want to speak to you. I've had a complaint of you this morning—no, not of you"—as the accountant raised his head angrily—"I was speaking to this young lady. The writing-master says your hand is not satisfactory."

"My hand, sir?" said Elise, fluttering the two white trifles that served her in that capacity.

"Your *handwriting*," answered Austin. "I understand that it isn't even legible. Now what in the world is the use of writing a letter if no one can read what you say? There's no excuse for that. I don't intend any girl to graduate from this school who cannot write a creditable note. So from now until the Easter vacation I want you to write a sample letter every day."

"To whom, sir?"

"To Miss Curtis, who will go over it with Mr. Browning and return it corrected."

Elise bowed, as one who never questioned authority. "Only," she said, "I often do write to Miss Curtis and she has never criticized my writing, or even my spelling, though I remember that in one of my last I spelled actress 'actrice,' which I found out for myself afterward was wrong, but Miss Curtis never said anything about it at all."

"Miss Curtis is almost too kind-hearted," said Austin.

"But *you* wouldn't be, would you, sir, if I wrote letters to you?"

"To me?" said Austin. The idea had its points, certainly. He caught the accountant's eye fixed upon him with a menacing glare. "My time is very much occupied. And yet," he added, as if yielding graciously, "a note a day would not take much time. Very well. Write to me, then."

The little princess beamed upon him. "Oh, thank you, sir," she said. "And what shall I write about?"

"Anything that has caught your attention during the day—it doesn't matter."

"Such funny things catch my attention sometimes," she replied, thoughtfully. "But I'm afraid that our talking disturbs your bookkeeper."

"No, no," said Bevans, looking as if he didn't much care if he were disturbed or not. "These fellows are accustomed to working in all sorts of noises. However, that's all I had to say to you—a note every morning, and I'll return it to you corrected." He opened the door with a gesture of dismissal.

Just as she went out her glance crossed for an instant the eyes of the accountant,

and at once the sound of an erasure was heard from the desk. It seemed to Austin that the young man was peculiarly lacking in concentration.

"Would you prefer to work in another room?" he said.

"No," replied the other, in a strangled tone. "I would much rather be here—where I can consult you if necessary."

"All right," said Austin, "only we are very apt to be interrupted."

They were interrupted within a few minutes; this time by Miss Hayes. A definite situation had developed between Austin and Miss Hayes even in these few days. It was perfectly recognized between them that they were opponents. They wanted different things for women, for the school, and for Elise Benedotti. Yet he and she could co-operate in minor matters in a way that he and Miss Curtis, who admired him so much as to be absolutely inhibited from understanding what he meant, couldn't manage at all.

Miss Hayes, like many mathematicians, was a great believer in the power of the spoken word. She always felt that if she could state her case she could convince. She had been looking for her moment.

"Is this a good time for me to talk to you?" she asked, considerate as always of other people's leisure.

"Excellent," answered Austin. "Except," he added, with a disarming smile, "I don't suppose I'm going to like what you have to say."

"All the more reason for hearing it," she returned. "Mr. Bevans, the intellectual standards of this school are going down, really they are, and that's hard on those of us who have given the best part of our lives to building them up. I know you think the girls are going to get something to compensate them, but isn't it really something that compensates *you*—men, I mean? I feel as if there were something profoundly wrong and unjust in a young man having control of the destinies of these girls. One knows what men have always thought women ought to be educated for."

"You think it's like letting the butcher decide on the happiest destiny for lambs?"

She brushed his frivolity aside. "But I didn't really come to speak about the general theory. I want to speak of one girl—of Elise. I have known her since she was a child, and you don't know her at all. I want you to make an exception in her case.

I want you to let her go on with her college preparation. She doesn't need to be taught charm. She has too much already. After a good deal of indecision she has finally formed a determination to go to college, in spite of her grandfather's disapproval. Don't prevent her carrying out that resolve."

"If she has formed a real determination, I couldn't prevent her," said Austin.

Miss Hayes looked him straight in the eyes. "Yes, you could," she answered. "You have done exactly what you intended to do; you have gained a decisive influence over all these girls—particularly over Elise, who is extremely impressionable. In the end she will do exactly what you tell her to do."

The words intoxicated Austin a little. "You don't think I'd tell her anything but what I thought best for her, do you?"

"Oh no, no," said Miss Hayes, desperately, "but I think you don't *know*. Mr. Bevans, I think you are a very ignorant boy, and you think me an unhuman old maid, and we may both be right. It doesn't matter. The point is Elise. You must consider what you offer her in place of college for the next four years. She isn't to stay here with us. She is to go back and live with her grandfather, where no young person would be

particularly happy, and where Elise will be incredibly lonely. You, perhaps, don't understand how much that child craves affection, intimate daily affection. She has one of the warmest, tenderest hearts I ever knew. If you send her to live alone in that great lonely house with that selfish, busy old man, she will simply marry the first commonplace boy who presents himself. I hear there's one hanging about her now. But I'm afraid we are disturbing the bookkeeper. He doesn't seem to be able to work while we talk."

"Oh no, he doesn't even hear us," said Austin, impatient of this interruption to the train of thought. "Who's hanging about her?"

"No one of importance—her room-mate's brother, I hear."

"Elise seems to be a little young for that sort of thing," Austin began in a manner thoroughly pedagogic, but Miss Hayes interrupted him:

"Too young? Why, half the girls are engaged and all of them in love. As for Elise, I could tell you things about her love-affairs for the last two years. Too young! Why, that just shows that you really are not fit to have the education of girls. When

Elise was sixteen, there was a Frenchman—But that wouldn't interest you, I suppose." She stopped suddenly, aware that both men were hanging upon her next word. In fact, the accountant had risen, and now. to explain his action, he said, faintly:

"That's all I can do on the books now. I must go."

"You must go?" said Austin. "I thought you were here for the rest of the morning."

"Oh no," said Miss Hayes, "the books are only half his work. Mrs. Bevans always laid great stress on the importance of the girls understanding simple bookkeeping. He has a class with the seniors—ten minutes' individual instruction with each. I'll show him the way."

The principle that the girls should know how to balance their own check-books was one with which Austin was in thorough accord, and yet when Miss Hayes had hurried the accountant away he found himself with a vague sense of discomfort. He had taken a swift and unaccountable dislike to George Boyd. It seemed to him also that the bookkeeper's attention had been peculiarly alert while Elise was in the room. The idea of her receiving individual instruction from that young man was disagreeable to

Austin. Of course he supposed that Miss Curtis would arrange for such lessons to be properly chaperoned; but had a man in his position any right to suppose? Didn't he owe it to the girls' parents to be absolutely sure? He closed his roller-top desk and went over to the main building to satisfy himself.

The individual lessons in bookkeeping (open to seniors only) took place in Miss Curtis's study, and she, devoted soul, had just as keen a desire that they should be properly chaperoned as Austin himself had. She greeted George civilly, and asked his name.

"Boyd," said George.

"Ah!" said Miss Curtis. "We have a student of that name."

"The name is not uncommon, I find."

"Shall we call the young ladies alphabetically?" she asked.

Observing that the name of Benedotti stood first on the list, George replied that this seemed to him by far the wisest course to follow.

It was rather disappointing, therefore, to see Miss Curtis return with his own sister, who was very red in the face and showed a dangerous tendency to giggle.

"Miss Benedotti was not quite ready, and so I brought the next name on the list. My dear Sally," she added, as Sally was suddenly shaken by a suspicious cough, "I hope you haven't taken cold."

No, Sally assured her that she hadn't, and took her place at the desk.

"Do you have any special difficulty with your accounts?" inquired the bookkeeper.

"Yes," said Sally, "the difficulty of keeping any money in the bank," and she giggled irrepressibly.

Miss Curtis reproved such levity with a kindly word, but the accountant, seizing a pencil, wrote down this less polite admonition: "Behave, you idiot."

"The general scheme of a monthly balance with the bank," he went on, "and of course you must balance monthly—is this—" And again having recourse to his pencil he wrote: "Get this old girl out of the room while Elise is here."

"I can't do it," said Sally, aloud.

"Oh yes, you can, if you try," answered the accountant, and Miss Curtis thought he gave the dear girl an unnecessarily severe look.

Exactly at the end of ten minutes Sally was dismissed and Elise entered. She did

not glance at her new instructor, but said, unsmilingly, to Miss Curtis: "I can't see any point in my taking this course, Miss Curtis. My grandfather would always have some young man from his bank take care of my check-book for me."

"Perhaps," said the accountant, haughtily, "you mightn't always be able to get a young man from the bank."

"I've never found any trouble about that," said the little princess. But she sat down at the desk, and George opened her check-book and turned over the pages.

"To self, to self, to self— Why, Miss Benedotti," he said, reprovingly, "this is no way to keep a book. You don't say for what you draw the amounts."

"Sometimes I do," she returned, and she pointed to one item which read, "For George's birthday present, $20."

The accountant colored deeply. "It was a wonderful present," he said. "I mean it must have been."

"It was nice," answered the princess, "but not too nice for George." And then turning to Miss Curtis she asked, innocently, "Is it part of this gentleman's duty to comment on the way I spend my money?"

"No, certainly," said Miss Curtis, who

had been thinking the same thing, but lacked the courage to initiate the remark. And at this moment Sally appeared at the door

"Please, Miss Curtis, you're wanted on the long-distance telephone," she said. "And the operator says to be sure to use the switch in the pantry, as she would have to disconnect you if you used any other."

Miss Curtis looked wistfully at the telephone standing so conveniently on her desk. "How very strange!" she said.

"Isn't it!" said Sally, cordially, and managed to carry her point.

"Elise," said the accountant, passionately, as soon as they were alone, "you must never go to that man's office alone like that—never. You don't know how it looked when I found you there—in his arms."

"George!" said Elise. "How dare you say such a thing, when it was the way you opened the door that nearly knocked me down. Mr. Bevans was only trying to—"

"Nonsense!" cried George. "That had nothing to do with his liking it. My point is he liked having you in his arms. Who wouldn't!"

Elise looked down, and then in a voice hardly audible said: "How could you pos-

sibly tell that, George—that Mr. Bevans liked it? How could you know?"

"How did I know?" said George, who innocently supposed that his veracity was being impugned. "Why, by his expression, by his eyes. Do you think I don't know the world? And those letters, Elise, ordering you to write to him every day under the pretense of improving your handwriting. Oh, if I could only order you to write to me every month, how happy I should be! You're too innocent to understand, dear, but that man is in love with you—insanely, passionately in love with you."

Elise did not immediately answer this, for the simple reason that she couldn't, but she drew back a little to get a better look at George, and her eyes seemed to have increased to twice their usual size and brilliance. It was at this moment that Austin entered. Exactly what he had feared had happened.

"What's this?" he said. "Where's Miss Curtis?" And before any one had got round to answering him, Miss Curtis herself hurried into the room, talking.

"The funniest thing," she was saying. "Central kept on repeating, 'Number please, number please,' when it was they who specially told me—"

"Miss Curtis," said Austin, with a sort of cold violence, "I consider it essential that a teacher remain in the room during these lessons; if you do not feel able to obey this rule, we must make other arrangements."

The soundest and best explanation always sounded like a flimsy excuse in Miss Curtis's mouth, but no one could have made the story of the pantry switch sound like anything but nonsense. Austin received it in a glowering silence, and remained during the rest of the lesson. When it was over he took whatever satisfaction was to be derived from making Miss Curtis cry bitterly. After which he suddenly recovered his temper and felt very much ashamed of himself.

"I'm sorry I was cross," he said, "but—"

"Oh, I know," she answered. "You feel your great responsibility to the parents."

"Yes, of course," said Austin. "And I don't like this young man. He seems to take a personal interest in the girls."

"Oh no!" said Miss Curtis, shocked at the idea that a bookkeeper should so far forget himself. "I think you do him injustice. I watched him closely while he was giving Sally her lesson, and there was nothing of the kind, nothing, although poor Sally was quite silly and giggled and made foolish answers."

"There was nothing of that kind with Elise."

"Oh no, but then Elise is very different."

That was the way it seemed to Austin.

The next day the first of her notes arrived. It was written in a careful, clear hand, and no one could have missed a word:

DEAR MR. BEVANS,—You told me to write about anything that struck me—did you see the moon last night? It came up suddenly out of a black cloud with silver edges. I watched it a very long time as it shone down upon your cottage, and I hoped you were not missing such a very lovely sight.

Yours,

ELISE.

Now it struck Austin as a strange coincidence that he had observed the moon—the very lovely sight—and had felt, as he could not help suspecting the writer of that letter had felt, that it was a pity to view so much beauty without a sympathetic companion. This, however, was not the comment he wrote upon the letter, which, after deliberation, he did not submit to the writing-master's criticism. He did his own criticizing. He was extremely conscientious about it.

"This is much better as to writing than I was led to suppose," he wrote, "though

your capital I's and S's are too much alike. In a note of this kind it is better to sign your full name, with some more formal expression than 'yours.' Also, avoid the excessive use of the word 'very.'"

He had some misgivings lest he had been too severe, but the next day's note betrayed no hurt feelings.

DEAR MR. BEVANS,—We are reading Shelley in English literature, but some of the most beautiful things we have not read in class. I find my enjoyment of poetry increases as I grow older. Some of these lines ring in my head day and night, like "I never thought before my death to see youth's vision thus made perfect"—and all that part that follows which doubtless you know.

Very respectfully yours,
ELISE BENEDOTTI.

Now it happened that Austin's education had been somewhat neglected in the matter of poets. He did not know either the line or its context. But he found out before he went to bed that night. He spent a delightful evening, only, he wondered, was "Epipsychidion" the best reading for school-girls?

He began to look forward to the notes almost as much as to the checks for the last semester, and this was saying a good deal, for, as he constantly reminded himself, he

had gone into school-teaching strictly on the commercial basis. One of her letters ran:

DEAR MR. BEVANS,—What do you think about moods? I know what you will say—that we should conquer them. I think so, too. But how? All to-day I have been so dreadfully depressed—so that my heart really aches like a tooth, and anything beautiful makes me want to cry. Yet I have no reason for being unhappy—quite the contrary. I keep telling myself how fortunate I am—one of the luckiest girls. Only the world seems so large and dangerous, and I so small and inexperienced.

Respectfully yours,

ELISE BENEDOTTI.

The subject of punctuation was one to which Austin had never even given a passing thought, but now the idea that Elise used too many dashes haunted him like a nightmare. It was hard on him to feel obliged to get up the whole subject, because, ever since the Latin teacher had quoted something to him which he couldn't understand, he was spending all his evenings trying to reacquire a reading knowledge of Virgil. But now, nothing daunted, he borrowed a book on punctuation from the English teacher, and after he had done his Virgil—that is to say from eleven to midnight, he gave his whole

attention to the use of stops. As usual, his active mind was rewarded by a new interest. "There's more in punctuation than I thought," he said to himself. Whoever else the school was instructing, it was certainly giving its head-master a liberal education.

CHAPTER V

THE first of his Monday-evening lectures was given by a popular young actor, caught between engagements. It was on the subject of voice-placing. He showed them how it was possible to make a whisper heard at a great distance.

"I wish grandfather were here to learn that," Elise whispered to Sally.

The second lecture was by Lady Peale, better known under her Fifth Avenue name of Lueline, who spoke on the History and Philosophy of Fashion in Dress. Austin hoped that as the girls giggled over pictures of crinolines and bustles they got the idea of how comic some of their own exaggerations would be to future generations.

And through all of his plans and arrangements during those first weeks the hope of Susie's ultimate presence moved like a beneficent ghost. He had not seen her, although he had been twice to the house. He was prepared, however, for Mrs. Rolles's arrangements to be too good to break down

under a haphazard visit. He had written, and had no answer. He had telephoned, and found it impossible to get Susie to come to the telephone. Austin, who was one of those people who have the strange combination of sensitiveness and persistence which causes them to go on running their breasts against the lance of circumstance and to feel the resulting wound, was deeply wounded now, but not as deeply wounded as he would have been if he had not been so terribly busy.

But on the afternoon that the girls went away for the brief Easter vacation, he had the inspiration of calling up Mrs. Rolles herself. After all, she would be better than no one. He could at least talk to her about Susie, and find out if David were making more of a success than he had—David with that "very aristocratic kind of ugliness" that Austin envied so much.

Mrs. Rolles was all graciousness, and asked him, or rather permitted him, to come to tea that very afternoon. Nothing was said about Susie, but of course he knew she would be out, or he would not have been allowed to come.

As he entered, the ugliness of the brocaded drawing-room struck him for the first time.

"You've changed this room, haven't you?" he said, not at once appreciating where the change had really taken place.

"Changed?" said Mrs. Rolles, proudly. "No, not in twenty-five years. And so," she went on, presently, when tea had been brought in—"so you have become a schoolmaster?"

"Yes, and a darned successful one, too," said Austin, surprised to note another change had come over his spirit. In old times he had pretended not to be afraid of Mrs. Rolles—now, incredible as it seemed, he actually wasn't. He found that he regarded her simply as a parent, and parents were now to him as seals to Hagenbeck.

Mrs. Rolles smiled. "And I suppose your idea is that you can get Susie to come and darn socks and be a mother to the pupils?"

"A model—not a mother," answered Austin. "I want to be able to point to her as an example of my method of education."

"But it was I educated Susie, not you, Mr. Bevans."

"Ah, but my system of education is founded on your ideas, though, as a matter of fact, on a show-down I believe it would be found that I had had a lot to do with

educating Susie, too. That's what parents never can appreciate—the amount of influence young men have on the philosophy of young girls. That's part of my system, too."

"Indeed!" replied Mrs. Rolles, settling back in her chair. "And so you have a principle of education?"

"You bet I have," said Austin. "It's this—that because I'm young and a man I can put over ideas that they wouldn't listen to from any woman. And, as a matte- of fact, I can. For instance, I'm like you, I'm opposed to my girls going to college. When I took the school seventy-five per cent. of the seniors were booked for college, and now only one girl even talks of going. You see, you can't take away one ideal without substituting another, and I substituted the ideal of their being charming, gracious, helpful women of the world. Well, that went very well with all but this one—she knows she's going to be charming, anyhow, and she thinks she might as well have a college education as well. What am I going to do with her, Mrs. Rolles?"

"Describe her to me."

"Oh," said Austin, falling into the trap, "she's the prettiest little creature you ever saw—not so small, and yet you think of her

as being hardly as big as a minute, because she has a little bit of a face, and ridiculous hands and feet, and eyes as big as all outdoors. She's one of those creatures who behave like a wounded bird and have the determination of an elephant. She trembles when you speak to her, cries if you raise your voice, and, by Heaven! inside she's absolutely unchanged by anything you may say. What do you think of that, Mrs. Rolles?"

"I think you're in love with her," said Mrs. Rolles, calmly, and yet, such strange mixed beings are mothers, she felt a distinct pang that her Susie should be so quickly supplanted.

"You of all people," he answered, reproachfully, "ought to know that that isn't true. My interest is purely paternal—or whatever you call it. But of course I am interested. You don't know how much I want to do the right thing by these girls. I know I'm right about the others—not letting them go, but this one is such a sweet little thing, perhaps it wouldn't hurt her to know a little something. What do you think?"

"I think it ruins every girl to go to college."

"Have you known many college women?"

"None," said Mrs. Rolles, drawing herself up.

"Then it's just a theory with you?"

"My dear Mr. Bevans, it isn't a theory that there are certain experiences that rub off the bloom."

Austin simply couldn't bear the thought of Elise losing any of her bloom. And yet, on the other hand, there was that terrible commonplace boy lurking for her if she returned to her grandfather's. It really was a dreadful problem, and he found it a comfort to talk it over with an expert like Mrs. Rolles—such a comfort that he almost missed his train. He had an appointment with Miss Curtis to go over and sign the reports for the term.

As he stepped on the moving train he realized with a start that he had made practically no effort to see Susie at all. But, he consoled himself by reflecting, it wouldn't have done any good if he had.

On his desk he found a fresh gardenia and a last letter from the little princess. He had told himself that he hadn't expected it, yet his eyes had sought it in the accustomed place as soon as he entered the room.

DEAR MR. BEVANS,—We are all going home. I asked Miss Hayes what made a home, and she laughed and said it was where you had your washing done. It seems to me it is wherever you can find the one person who makes life beautiful and interesting to you. We have to learn a piece of poetry for the English class during the vacation. Do you know one that begins, "What shall I do with all the days and hours that must elapse before I see thy face'? I am thinking of learning that.

Good-by, dear Mr. Bevans. I hope you will be well and happy through these long, long holidays.

Yours,

E. B.

The long, long holidays were four days. Austin put the little piece of paper in his pocket, without any penciled criticism, although he was aware of the defective paragraphing of the letter. He thought it odd how a line of verse, particularly not very good verse, would get ringing in your head. "What shall I do with all the days and hours—" They ought to teach the girls better stuff than that. He'd speak to Miss Curtis about it when she came over with the reports.

But as a matter of fact he never did speak to her about it.

About half past nine he heard hurried footsteps on his porch, Miss Curtis's voice

demanding entrance, and his aunt's Mary replying that she had no intention of keeping her out. The next moment Miss Curtis entered and, sinking into a chair, burst into tears, while Miss Hayes, retaining her habitual calm, smiled at Austin over her colleague's head and said, simply:

"It's not quite as bad as that."

"It is, it is," sobbed Miss Curtis. "The little princess—"

"Has anything happened to Elise?"

"No," said Miss Hayes.

"Yes," said Miss Curtis.

Austin looked from one to the other, and Miss Hayes, seeing that Miss Curtis was quite beyond explanation, said, dryly:

"It appears, Mr. Bevans, that charm is like rain and falls upon the just and the unjust. Elise has been charming the new bookkeeper."

"The bookkeeper?" exclaimed Austin, and a sort of physical nausea swept over him.

"They've been carrying on a correspondence through the accounts," said Miss Hayes.

"Such letters!" wailed Miss Curtis. "The cleaning-woman found them in her desk. She asked me if they were any good, and I was about to say no, for they seemed to be just the accounts in the senior course,

when my eye happened to fall— Oh, Mr. Bevans, every one of them has a message on it. Elise—of all people! Do you want to see them?"

"I can't say I'm particularly keen to," replied Austin, holding out his hand for them, but it is doubtful if any one who attempted to take them from him would have left the room alive.

Strictly speaking, they were not letters, but scribbled sentences on the bottom of the accounts she turned in each week. "Why wouldn't you look at me this morning? Why was your tone so cold?" "You treat me like a dog, and yet I love you so."

For the first time in his life Austin had some idea of what Mrs. Rolles meant when she said things were vulgar. The idea of a red-faced accountant making love to the little princess seemed to him the vulgarest thing that had ever happened since the world was made.

"The damned beefy bounder!" he said. "I'd like to wring his neck."

"Oh no, no!" murmured Miss Curtis; "That would make such a scandal."

"I don't think you've read the worst one," said Miss Hayes, and he was grateful to her for retaining her habitual calm.

"There's one there that seems to imply she's writing regularly to some one else."

Austin found it at once.

Dearest, can't you see that fellow is in love with you? What would I give if you would write me a note every day—how I would treasure them! And the thought that every day—every day of your life you write regularly to him drives me mad.

Miss Hayes regarded him thoughtfully. "Now who can that be?" she said. "It's very unlike Elise to be a good correspondent."

"Oh, what do we know about them, when they can deceive us so? *Elise!* I shall never get over it," wailed Miss Curtis.

"I am inclined to regard this other man as the more serious of the two," said Miss Hayes, her eyes still fixed on Austin.

"Two!" cried Miss Curtis. "Oh, it's disgusting—degrading. I feel as if I should have to give up my work. When you think what must have taken place already—what must have been said between them in order that he should dare to write her such letters—"

It was just along these lines that Austin did not want to think. He sprang to his feet. "I'll go straight to her grandfather," he said.

"Oh no, *no!*" shrieked Miss Curtis. "Oh, Mr. Bevans, it will ruin the school if any parent got a hint of such a thing. They'd think we had been careless."

"And so we have been," said Austin, "damned careless. And if we are ruined, we're ruined, but at least I'm going to have the satisfaction of saying what I think."

He jammed his hat on his head and made his way rapidly toward the garage.

"What's he going to do? If he'd only listen to reason," said Miss Curtis, feebly. "He'll ruin the school."

"But what can you expect of a jealous boy?" said Miss Hayes.

"Jealous?" said Miss Curtis. "I don't understand. Who do you think is jealous? What do you mean?"

"Nothing," answered Miss Hayes.

Miss Curtis was the kind of person who allowed herself to be put off with an answer like that. It interested her more to go on weeping.

As Austin drove the geranium-colored car south toward the wide pink glare in the southern sky—which indicated, not an immense conflagration, but simply that New York was going on as usual—a conflict was taking place within him. He intended to

go straight to Mr. Johns—he was aware that this was his duty, and his idea was that during his drive to town he would think out terms in which he would expose the situation to the culprit's grandfather. But the deeper and stronger part of his nature intended something quite different, and he was continually discovering that the telling sentences he invented were all addressed to Elise.

As he drew up before Mr. Johns's door he saw that a party was going on. There was a striped awning, a red carpet, a policeman, and all the various signs of gaiety. But Austin was in no mood to be stopped by a mere party. He ran the car a few feet beyond the door, leaped out and was halfway up the steps when the policeman stopped him and said, with that reasonableness which of late years has become so much the fashion of the force:

"Look here, do you think you showed good judgment leaving that car next the hydrant?"

"Officer," said Austin, "if you knew all I had on my mind you'd be surprised that I have any judgment at all."

"I don't think you have," answered the officer. On which Austin moved his car and went into the house.

The appearance of a young man in morning-clothes at half past ten at night in the midst of a party would have been repellent to Mr. Johns's butler, who liked entertainments and liked them well done. He, however, was busy in the dining-room, and the footman, who let Austin in, not only remembered him from his former visit, but, like Portia, remembered him worthy of praise.

"I wonder," said Austin, who had the American distaste to giving a direct order, particularly to other people's servants, "I wonder if I could see Mr. Johns for a few minutes?"

Even the footman knew better than to bring him, attired as he was, directly into the ball-room. "I'll inquire, sir," he said, and ushered him into a little waiting-room near the stairs, shutting the door behind him.

The footman had little idea how much was accomplished by this simple action, for this little room, unknown to most of the guests, was at that time occupied by Elise and George. They were sitting on either side of a nice open fire, engaged in a conversation which came to an abrupt halt—as perhaps any conversation would—on the entrance of Austin.

CHAPTER VI

AUSTIN, by some mysterious process more direct than vision, had recognized that the feminine figure was Elise, although the tip of her silver slipper was all he could see as the door first opened, but he was not in the least prepared to discover that her companion was his erring accountant. He fixed him with a blank and astonished eye which, to a guilty conscience, looked like severity. Elise flew forward.

"Oh, Mr. Bevans," she said, "how wonderful that you should be here! Will you come up-stairs and dance with me?" And for the first time Austin became aware that somewhere in the house an orchestra was playing dance music.

"I don't dance," he answered. It was an uncompromising lie.

Elise was disappointed. She was dressed in shining white, with a green wreath in her hair and a green feather fan in her hand, but her added beauty did not soften Austin's heart—on the contrary, it made him feel

all the more acutely the utter degradation of her conduct.

"I came to see Mr. Johns," he said.

"Oh, George, run up-stairs and tell grandfather that Mr. Bevans is here," said Elise, with far less consideration than Austin had shown to the footman.

"No," said Austin. "I came to see Mr. Johns about this young man, and it may be that he would like to offer me some explanation of his conduct first."

George, who did not like being referred to as "this young man," said, proudly, "I don't feel any obligation to explain my conduct to you, sir."

"I was offering you an opportunity—not an obligation," said Austin.

"I am not ashamed of anything that I have done," said George.

"Indeed!" replied Austin. "Then let me tell you your face belies you. Step to that mirror and see if a human countenance ever wore a more guilty expression."

Such was the disarray of George's mentality that he almost found himself obeying the command and moving toward the mirror over the mantelpiece. Pulling himself hastily together, however, he answered:

"My conduct requires no explanation

whatsoever. Mr. Johns's head bookkeeper selected me for this position. Mr. Johns can hardly object to my taking it. Have you any complaint of the way in which I filled the position?"

"I certainly have," said Austin.

"Am I not a competent bookkeeper?"

"As competent as any man under a strong emotional excitement could be, I suppose."

"I don't understand you."

"That has been quite clear from the beginning," said Austin. "The fact is, Mr. Boyd, you have made the common mistake of explaining the wrong crime. I have no objection to your having taken the position of bookkeeper in the school."

"What do you object to?" asked George, relieved for an instant of apprehension.

"To your writing love-letters to your pupils; to your using their exercises as a means of communication; to these," he drew the letters from his pocket, "found in Miss Benedotti's desk."

"Oh, Elise!" said George, reproachfully.

The little princess, whose mind worked quicker than George's, had seen this coming for some time, and she now took action. She made a little gesture to indicate running upstairs. "Go away—please, George," she said.

The suggestion was not altogether disagreeable to George; two primitive instincts contended within him—self-preservation and jealousy; one bade him go and the other bade him stay, and in the end, like the great Gibbon, he sighed as a lover but obeyed as an accountant. He heard Austin begin, "Really, Elise, I have nothing to say to you in regard to this—" and then the door closed behind him. Elise closed it and, leaning her back against it, she looked at Austin.

"I have nothing whatever to say to you," Austin continued, while all the phrases he had been inventing especially for her benefit went whirling through his brain. "If you are really attached to this "— (the words "red-faced lout" rose to his lips, but he suppressed them)—"this young man with the consent of your grandfather, it is no concern of mine, but you shall not correspond with him clandestinely. It makes no difference to me what your feelings may be, but while you are in my school your conduct—"

"Mr. Bevans, is that really true?"

"Is what true?"

"That you don't care how I feel?"

He could not say that it was, and did not choose to say that it was not. In the

momentary pause he became aware that she was, as usual, trembling—trembling to such a degree that the air of the whole room seemed to be vibrating about her and, what was worse, setting up a sympathetic tremor in his own nerves. He said, angrily:

"Why do you tremble like that? Are you afraid of me?"

She shook her head and then as emphatically nodded it. Then she put up her hand to her mouth in a vain effort to control her lower jaw so that she could enunciate. "Not a bit—yes, I am—not exactly afraid—but I love you—I love you terribly."

It seemed to Austin that all sounds had suddenly died away and that he and she were left alone in an absolutely silent world. The truth was he had ceased to take note of anything but her. She stood quite still, until he began to speak, and then she stopped him.

"No, no, pl-please," she stammered, "don't say any of those things you are thinking of saying—that I'm too young to know what love is—and all that. I have so little time and it's so hard for me to tell you about it. You see, it doesn't matter about George—anything he says or does doesn't matter. He's been proposing to me every week since

I was fourteen, and grandfather thinks it would be a good way of getting rid of me; but he's just like a paving-stone I step on every day; I might notice it if it disappeared. What's the use of talking about him, or complaining to grandfather about him? He doesn't matter—nothing matters but you."

If Austin had been a student of the great psychologist whose works he had once recommended to Mr. Johns he would have known that strange passivity which he thought was calm was in reality the conflict within him of two strong and opposing emotions. He stood quiet, aware only of just what it would be like to take her in his arms. She now discovered that by pressing both hands against her chin she could in a measure control it, and she went on:

"It's terrible to feel like this—it eats me up. I used to be rather a silly girl about singers and actors and great people—used to think about them and make myself unhappy, but I wasn't unhappy—I enjoyed it. Oh, Mr. Bevans, I don't enjoy this—it's dreadful—it gives me no rest—I can't eat or sleep and all the time I have that horrid feeling here"— she pressed her hand against her heart—"that you have just before something very exciting happens. I get no

peace except when I'm with you, and then it almost kills me. What shall I do? what shall I do?" It was impossible for Austin to tell her what to do, for he was fully occupied telling himself what not to do—not to take her hand, not to pat her shoulder—not to offer her any sign of sympathy for fear it would end in something quite different.

"Now, just wait a moment," he contrived to say, and was horrified to find how strange his own voice sounded.

"Do you hate me to love you?" she asked.

"My dear child," he said, "I'll tell you something—nobody hates to be loved, and certainly no man could hate to be loved by a beautiful little being like you, and I've had a rotten life, and no one ever cared about me, except probably my mother, and I don't remember her."

Elise gave a gasp of joy; for, obviously, if no one had loved him, he had never really loved, for if he did he would be irresistible.

"But," he went on, "of course I'm not going to have you love me—not like this, because it isn't the best thing for you." He knew now what he had to do—he had to tell her about Susie; he wished that at the moment Susie seemed to him less like a vague agreeable perfume and more like a

living, breathing woman. He had to tell her about Susie, but first he must let her see that she herself was a matter of profoundest importance to him. He decided, in other words, to give the sweet first and the medicine afterward. He tried to outline for her the cherishing affection he had for her as a pupil—for *her* in particular. "And I shall go on feeling like that," he said, "when you have forgotten that I was ever anything to you but the head of your school."

"When I'm an old, withered woman like Miss Curtis," she answered, "I shall love you just as I do to-night."

And then, most unfortunately, the door opened and Mr. Johns came in, and the announcement about Susie had not been made.

"Hullo, Bevans!" Mr. Johns began to shout, in his most holiday humor. "George Boyd told me you wanted to see me. What are you doing at a frivolous occasion like this—a staid old schoolmaster like you? Want to spoil the girls' fun by reminding them of lessons, eh?"

Austin smiled vaguely. He was trying to think out what it was he had once wanted to see Mr. Johns about.

"Well, my dear," Johns went on, taking

Elise's limp hand, "how's it going? As much fun as you expected? Your hands are cold. By Jove! Bevans, what would you give to be at an age when your hands are like ice, and you tremble—yes, tremble, at the pleasure of a mere dance? My, I couldn't get as excited as that if I were going to wreck a bank." He patted her hand and replaced it at her side, as if of herself she would not have sense enough to know what to do with it. "Ah, Bevans, youth, youth—no cares, no troubles. Run up and dance, my dear; we won't keep you doing the civil—dance and get your circulation started. And now what the deuce was it you wanted to say to me, Bevans?"

Austin hesitated. In view of what had just occurred, it did seem absurd to cite George as a criminal disturber of the little princess's peace of mind. She saw his hesitation, gave him a last smile to assure him that whatever he decided to do would be perfect, and disappeared.

Mr. Johns settled into a chair, bit off a cigar, and prepared for a chat along lines of his own selection.

"Notice that young feller, Boyd?" he said.

"Did I notice him?" echoed Austin.

"Wasn't he here when you came in?

Sweet on Elise. They think I'm awfully opposed—sneak off like that, you know, so that I won't see. They think I don't know—think we're all fools, Bevans. Maybe we are. It would surprise them to know I'm for it—that would take all the fun out of it. I believe girls ought to marry young—out of the way—out of mischief. Clean young feller—dull dog, though."

"Does Elise seem to—to fancy him?" asked Austin, and even put like this in the face of fact she knew to the contrary, the idea disgusted him.

"Don't know—treats him like the devil—that's no sign with a woman that she isn't crazy about him, though."

"Oh, Mr. Johns, for Heaven's sake don't get off that stuff about woman's being a mystery," cried Bevans. "Take it from the head of a girls' school that she isn't—she's just so clear and direct that men can't get the hang of it."

Mr. Johns gave a tremendous grunt. "Do you mean to tell me that at your age you think you know more about women than I do?" he shouted.

"Of course I think I do—and I do, too," said Austin. "I've got beyond that old mystery stage, anyhow."

One of the best ways of keeping your temper in an argument, as most of us know only too well, is not to listen to anything the other person has to say. This discussion now went forward very comfortably, each party to it using comparative leisure of the other one's speeches in order to marshal his own ideas.

"Direct and clear!" roared Mr. Johns—"why, I think you must be crazy. Women can't be clear, for they don't know how to think, and they can't be direct, for they don't know what they want, and when they do they change it. *Varium et mutabile*, that feller knew what he was talking about."

"Yes, and who said that?" cried Austin, for the first time appreciating that his midnight studies of Virgil had not been wasted, "a slick male god trying to get a wandering widower to desert a woman so constant that she immediately burned herself up on the seashore when he actually went."

"Ha!" said Mr. Johns, "and do you call that sensible—to burn yourself up on the beach? Do you quote that as a rational, intelligent action?"

"I call it clear and direct, anyhow," said Austin, and at this instant the door again opened and this time George hurried in.

The instinct of self-preservation had sent George up-stairs; once safe, however, his jealousy had suggested his sending Mr. Johns down to interrupt the tête-à-tête, by the assertion that Austin had come to tell him something. But hardly was this successfully accomplished than George began to consider in great agony of mind what it was that Austin was telling. He believed not only that he would be most unacceptable to Mr. Johns as a suitor, but that his conduct in masquerading as an accountant at the school would lose him his job at the bank, and unless properly explained might damage his whole financial future.

He hurried down, therefore, and as he entered he never doubted that it was his conduct, not Dido's, which the two men were hotly discussing. Assuming a slightly pompous calm, which he was far from feeling, he said, "Mr. Johns, I have a right to be heard." Neither of the others answered him, and he continued, with even greater firmness, "Even a criminal has a right to be, and I am not a criminal."

"Well, that's good news, George," said Mr. Johns, who had not yet the least idea what it was all about.

"I wish an opportunity to explain," continued George.

"I thought your conduct did not require explanation," said Austin, delighted to find some one to be disagreeable to.

"You go right ahead, George," said his host, "and explain anything you have a mind to."

"To begin with," said George, "I am a competent bookkeeper."

"Wrong at the start," replied Mr. Johns. "However, you're no worse than the others, so go on with the explanation."

"I had a perfect right, at the suggestion of your own head man, to accept employment outside the bank if I saw fit. I cannot allow any discussion on that point."

"Anybody want to discuss it?" asked Johns.

"And as for the letters," continued George, "the letters which this gentleman found and *read*"—he emphasized this bitingly—"all I can say about them is to be candid, Mr. Johns, and tell you that I love your granddaughter."

"God bless my soul!" shouted Mr. Johns, beginning a most elaborate series of grunts and scowls.

"I know, I know, sir," said George, stand-

ing his ground in spite of the terror that those manifestations always roused in him. "I know it surprises you. I had not intended to tell you until my financial position was better, but it's the truth. I do love her, and some day I hope to marry her."

"Well, you don't expect me to agree to any such proposition as that," said Johns, his eyes twinkling brightly at Austin under his drawn brows. "Ten years hence is time enough to think of her marrying, and then to some one—"

"I did not expect you to approve," answered George. "But you will not forbid my seeing her and writing to her sometimes?"

Johns, who was beginning to get a pretty good idea of the situation, was enjoying himself immensely. "I don't think we can object to an occasional letter—eh, Bevans?" he said. He had expected Austin to be as much amused as himself, and was surprised to hear him answer, quickly:

"I expressly forbid Boyd's writing to Elise—or to any pupil in my school, except his sister."

"*You* forbid me!" cried George. "You forbid me to write to Elise, and yet you order her to write to you—every day, too."

"Eh, what's that?" asked Mr. Johns. "He orders Elise to write to him?"

"Yes," replied George, feeling he was scoring for the first time. "He has her write to him every day."

"And does she?" asked her grandfather.

"You bet she does," answered Austin, who was no coward. "I've been trying to improve her writing and spelling, which aren't much good, you know, Mr. Johns."

"He's right there, George," said Mr. Johns, but Austin could feel that those bright little eyes dwelt contemplatively upon him for an instant.

"Mr. Johns," said George, "you ought to see those letters. What is in them? We—you, I mean, have a right to know."

Austin smiled quite in the grand manner. "You can see them easily enough, if Elise keeps them. I always correct them and give them back to her." And then he remembered that he had one uncorrected in his pocket at that very moment which he would not let them see on any account.

"Well," said Mr. Johns, "suppose we effect a compromise. I have no objection to Mr. Bevans improving her handwriting, and I have no objection to your writing to her now and then, George."

"Not at my school," said Austin.

"Come, Bevans, don't be hard," said Mr. Johns. "You were young once, I suppose, even though you are a schoolmaster. I think George here showed a certain romantic spirit very commendable in a young man in breaking into your school, and, after all, you know, you can't object to my granddaughter receiving letters from any one, if I say it's all right."

"I can and do," replied Austin.

Mr. Johns turned to George. "You send your letters to me, George," he said, soothingly, "and I'll see that Elise gets them."

George was so astonished at this treatment that he decided to take Mr. Johns completely into his confidence. "Oh, sir," he cried, "don't you see how it is? Don't you see that this man is in love with Elise himself?"

"I am not in love with Elise," answered Austin, quickly, and as he heard his own assertion ring out so clear and positive for the first time it occurred to him that the statement was not, strictly speaking, true.

Johns wheeled upon Austin, as if he had expected to catch him with a sonnet on his eyelash, but seeing nothing evidential, he

turned back to George and asked, "Whatcher mean?"

"He's always having interviews with her, and letters, and he's jealous of me. Can't you see that? But," said the exasperated George, "I don't suppose any one cares much how he feels, if it weren't that I'm afraid that she's getting fond of him."

This time the assertion roused some confirmatory memories in Mr. Johns. He recalled Elise's chill, trembling fingers, her eyes, her voice. He wheeled again on Austin, and this time met a glance too blank and steady to be normal. "Ha!" he said, and in the silence that followed this momentous monosyllable the loud, insistent tones of the supper march reached their ears. Johns got hastily to his feet.

"Good Lord!" he said. "There's supper. What will Mrs. Rolles say?"

"Mrs. who?" exclaimed Austin.

"Lady I'm taking to supper. Hope you'll stay, Bevans."

It seemed to Austin a proof of the finest delicacy of feeling on his part that after the events of the evening he did not want to see Susie, who, he knew, must be there if her mother was. He could not, he said to himself, speak to Susie without betraying the

strength of his love for her, and this would be an unnecessary insult to the poor little princess. He preferred to deny himself one of the supreme pleasures of his life and go away without seeing the object of his unique affection.

"No, thank you," he said. "I must be going. I'll just wait here until they get into the dining-room." Already the sound of voices could be heard on the stairs.

Left alone, he sank into a chair and lit a cigarette. He felt profoundly distressed by what had happened. It was a dreadful thing that he should have to be the cause of unhappiness to one of the children committed to his charge—he, who ought to be willing to lay down his life to save theirs. An idea came to him. It was possible, it was even likely, that the little princess had exaggerated her emotions; the first grown man she met might drive her schoolmaster out of her head; but if she were right, if this really were her great passion, could he give his life to anything better than trying to make her happy? Susie didn't care for him, might never, perhaps, care, though he hadn't been able to face the truth before. Wasn't it his duty to make the sacrifice?

The stern daughter of the voice of God

seemed to speak with a clear but not wholly disagreeable accent.

He thought Elise might slip back for an instant, just to say good night to him, but, though he waited a long time, she did not come, and so he finally went away.

In the mean time Mr. Johns hurried upstairs to find Mrs. Rolles, the oldest and most important lady there, sitting entirely alone on a slender gilt chair in the midst of the ball-room. It would not be true to say that Mr. Johns feared Mrs. Rolles, for he didn't, but he treated her almost as an equal.

"Nearly late—nearly late," he said, cheerily, hurrying across the empty room.

"You are late, Mr. Johns," said Mrs. Rolles, rising and taking his arm, "but I dare say you have some excellent reason for a rudeness which is doubtless only apparent."

"Well, I have," he said, stumping hastily down the stairs with her. "I've been having an interview with Elise's schoolmaster—devil of a lot of fuss about the education of the young—more trouble than it's worth, I often think. What use is education to 'em, anyhow?—girls especially."

Mrs. Rolles stopped short. "Don't tell me," she said, "that Austin Bevans is here in this house? Oh, I hope not!"

"No—was—gone," said Mr. Johns. "Why do you care?"

"Because he's given me a great deal of trouble by being in love with my Susie."

"Oh-ho!" said Mr. Johns. "So it's her, is it?"

Mrs. Rolles did not trouble to correct his grammar. "Yes, he's been hanging about for a good many years, but lately I haven't let him see her, and you know, Mr. Johns, young people forget each other beautifully if you don't allow them to meet—particularly if they are meeting some one else. Young Bevans came to see me the other day, and I got the clearest impression that he's sentimentally interested in one of his pupils. If I can keep Susie out of his way for a little longer, I believe I shall get rid of him entirely."

Mr. Johns gave a grunt, an entirely new kind of grunt—it was long and cooing, like the note of an organ.

"Interested in one of his pupils, you say?"

"Yes; he came to see me the other day—you know I can't help liking him, Mr. Johns, though I won't let Susie like him."

"How do you stop it?"

"Oh, there are ways, if you know how—with girls, at least. He came to see me the

other day and talked all the time about one of his pupils who wants to go to college, and I could see he was emotionally interested. Besides, he did not even ask to see Susie. It's the parting of the ways, if I manage it right."

Mr. Johns's business success had been due not only to his grunt and shout, but also to his power of acting instantly. And he saw now that he must act.

"Now you make a great mistake," he said, "about that young man. He's one of the coming men of America. He's not going to stick at school-teaching—not much. Too valuable. Why, I'd give him a salary of twenty thousand a year to start to manage any of our Western branches. He has sense, creative genius, puts anything over. Now I'll tell you a secret. I'm making him an offer to-morrow—dare say he won't take it—but I'm making it, after consultation with my directors, of course, to go to St. Louis and organize all our branches. He'll go far. Of course if you don't like him that's one thing, but don't make any mistake about his financial future. Genius. I don't see it often. When I do I snap it up—snap it up."

Mrs. Rolles began to look thoughtful.

"Mr. Johns," she said, "you would not like him to marry Elise."

"Elise?" said Johns. "Why, a man like Bevans wouldn't look at an immature little creature like my Elise. He's looking for some one who can help him in his career—not financially, you know, but a *grande dame* —some one who'd do him credit and help him along."

It might have been noticed by an acute observer—only none were there—that for the rest of the supper both Mr. Johns and Mrs. Rolles showed a tendency to sink into deep thought. Once she interrupted a sentence of his about the champagne to ask, "Are you sure Mr. Bevans has gone?"

"Oh yes, yes! Doesn't care for this sort of thing—not a frivolous-minded young feller," answered Mr. Johns, and went back to considering how he would put that proposition to the directors; not that he anticipated any difficulty with them. He never had any trouble with his directors—if he did, he changed them.

Austin did not go back to the shelter of the white cottage on leaving Mr. Johns. On the contrary, he turned south and, having eventually let himself in to his old rooms with his latch-key, was presently sitting on

the edge of David's bed. It was only twelve o'clock, but David had gone to bed early, and had at once sunk into that deep first sleep from which every one is so reluctant to be roused. His first words were, "Well, well, what did I tell you?" which meant, though he never confessed it, that the dream of his life was that Austin would call on his legal knowledge to extricate him from the results of some hideous imprudence. Then, waking up and looking very wise, he said:

"Ah, Austin! How's the school?"

"All right," answered Austin. He had a frequent impulse to confide in his friend on account of his sound, sincere affection—an impulse always checked by David's unimaginative mental processes.

"Any of the little darlings in love with you yet?"

David supposed Austin was changing the subject when, instead of answering this question, he asked one of his own:

"How are you and Susie getting on?"

Rare indeed is the nature that does not become a little more intense when its own affairs come under discussion. David sat up, his rumpled hair mitigating that "aristocratic sort of ugliness" which Mrs. Rolles admired.

"Austin," he said, solemnly, "if it weren't that I know she's crazy about you, I'd really think I had a chance."

"Don't be an ass, Dave. No woman has ever been crazy about me—really."

David began a list of those who to his mind had betrayed an undying devotion, not one of whom would Austin admit as genuine. So that, at last, a little irritated by such skepticism, David said:

"Well, you don't expect a nice girl to come and tell you that she's dying for you, do you?"

"And why not?" exclaimed Austin, with feeling. "My Lord! David, I hate that sort of narrowness. If a girl feels a thing, is there any reason why she shouldn't tell it, just as much as a man?"

"Simply they don't—not the nice ones," said David, speaking as an observer, a lawyer, and a man of the world.

"The nice ones!" cried Austin. "You seem to think it isn't nice to be human; and, anyhow, who made you the arbiter of women's conduct?"

This was one of those absolutely impersonal discussions that seemed to rouse the most personal animosities. David's proposition was that Austin might allow women

to fool him as much as he liked, but that he, David, knew that women of true deep feeling would die simply rather than express it. Austin, on the other hand, was of the opinion that this iron self-control and maiden-modesty bunk was a good deal exaggerated, and if a girl didn't show the slightest feeling it was probably because she didn't have any.

They parted shortly before dawn on very bad terms, but made up over a late breakfast—that is to say, they each decided to pretend that nothing had gone wrong between them, and after a little while were surprised to find that, as a matter of fact, nothing had.

Austin spent the whole spring holiday—four days—with David. They neither of them saw Susie; Austin because, as he explained, he knew it would be no use to try; David because, as long as his friend couldn't, he thought it more honorable not to try. But they enjoyed themselves very much. One night at the theater Austin saw Elise in a box with the Boyds. George was leaning over her shoulder, but as soon as she saw Austin she moved her place so that no one could speak to her but Sally. Austin enjoyed the performance much more after this shift had been made. David, following

his eyes, asked who they were, and Austin answered that the fat girl was one of his pupils.

"If that large-eyed beauty were a pupil I might apply for a job," said David, but received no answer.

The last day of the holiday, about six, Mr. Johns suddenly presented himself in the little flat.

"Want to talk to you," he said, nodding at Austin and sniffing and grunting. "All right before this gentleman?"

David's gesture seemed to imply that bank presidents often came miles for the privilege of discussing their private affairs in his presence. Austin merely nodded. The fact that his conscience was no longer absolutely clear was shown by the fact that the grunts did not now leave him particularly calm. He wondered rather anxiously what it was that Mr. Johns could have to say.

Too impatient and too easily bored himself to take much time developing his ideas, Mr. Johns flung them out at once—Western banks—chain—affiliations—need of a live young feller—snap—Austin had it—good salary—$15,000—better than teaching school—leave that to Miss Hayes—she'd run it—man's job.

Austin rose, astonished not so much by the magnificent offer that was being made to him as by his own extreme repugnance to it.

"I don't want Miss Hayes to run my school," he said.

David, who saw instantly that all obstacles were now destroyed between the beloved Susie and his best friend, felt it his duty to say:

"My dear fellow, your future is assured."

"I know nothing whatsoever about banking," said Austin, as if this ignorance would certainly save him.

"Don't have to," answered Mr. Johns. "I'll furnish you with all the technical men you need. What I want of you is vision, snap, understanding of personalities, executive ability."

Austin was silent. He knew it was not an offer that any sane man could refuse, and then a thought came to him, apparently irrelevant, namely, that Elise would graduate from the school in a few weeks, anyhow.

He said that he felt most grateful and flattered, that he must take time to look about and find a successor at the school who would carry out his ideas, but that he believed he could say that by June—

Mr. Johns began shaking his head and

grunting. "Twenty-four hours is all I can give yer," he shouted. "My directors are a hasty, pig-headed bunch. They won't wait while you shilly-shally—want you to be in St. Louis within a month. Yes or no. Can't you say yes or no now?"

Before Mr. Johns left the room Austin had of course consented.

"And now," said David, as the door closed behind Mr. Johns, "I suppose you are going straight to Susie."

His friend frowned. "You seem to think I'm a pretty reckless fool, David," he said, "to rush off and try to get married on the mere vague promise of a salary. Do you realize that nothing has been put in writing yet? A nice position I should be in with Mrs. Rolles."

"It's as good as in writing."

"As good as in writing!" exclaimed Austin. "Well, really, my dear man, I hope you will be more careful of your clients' interests than of your friends'. I shall not regard this as settled until I have a letter from the directors."

David stared at him in surprise. He was not accustomed to having Austin preach caution to him.

"May I tell Susie about it?" he asked.

"Certainly not," said his friend.

Austin motored back that evening after dinner. The school opened the next morning, but the girls had been back twenty-four hours before he saw Elise—in other words, the machinery he had arranged to keep himself isolated was working admirably. Of course the whole school knew the story of George's romantic conduct, and Elise and even Sally were heroines as a result. The older man who had replaced George was not looked upon with favor.

Austin was not in any hurry to make his report to Miss Curtis and Miss Hayes as to what had happened in his interview with Mr. Johns. At the same time he wanted to know how Elise was doing, and so the second evening, after the opening of school, he came over to Miss Curtis's office, just before supper-time, to tell her and Miss Hayes as much as he wanted them to know.

Miss Curtis was in a flutter of happiness. "Isn't it wonderful how our confidence was justified?" she said. "I knew there could be no harm in it—no real harm—just a prank—dear Sally's brother."

"He's a very inferior young man, whoever his sister is," answered Miss Hayes.

"Exactly," Austin agreed, cordially.

"I suppose," said Miss Curtis, timidly, "that Mr. Johns was—was rather terrible?"

"Mr. Johns," said Austin, "was willing that the correspondence should continue, only, of course, I absolutely forbade that."

"I was sure dear Elise was not to blame," murmured Miss Curtis.

Austin cleared his throat. "How does Elise seem?" he inquired.

"Oh, the way girls do after they've been home for holidays," answered Miss Hayes, crossly. "If I had my way, children should never be allowed to go back to the parents. She looks pale and listless. All these parties and theaters—so silly."

Austin was silent; human beings were pitiful creatures, he thought. Miss Curtis protested. "You ought not to talk that way about parents, Eleanor," she said. "It would ruin the school if any of them heard you. But I must confess, Elise does seem to be in a curious state of mind. I said to her yesterday that she ought to take more interest in her work—set an example—she, who had everything in the world she could ask for, and she burst into tears. I had not meant to be harsh."

Miss Hayes fixed her eyes on Austin contemplatively. "Perhaps she hasn't got every-

thing she wants," she said. "So few of us have."

"What!" cried Miss Curtis, "young, pretty, rich, charming— Don't you think she's charming, Mr. Bevans?"

"She seems a very sweet child," Austin began, rather wildly, when a servant came in to say that two ladies were in the reception-room, asking to see him. They had not given their names.

"Parents," said Miss Curtis, looking alarmed.

"New applicants," said Miss Hayes, hopefully.

"Come with me while I talk to them," said Austin. Surrounded as it were by his staff, he entered the reception-room to find Mrs. Rolles and Susie.

"Will you take pity on us, dear Mr. Bevans?" said Mrs. Rolles, all graciousness. "The motor broke down not a mile away, and we thought of you at once. What a charming view you have here," she added to Miss Curtis, "and such attractive buildings," she threw out to Miss Hayes. "Will you give us some dinner, Mr. Bevans, or is that too much to ask?"

"Of course, delighted." He turned to Miss Curtis. "We'll all three dine in the school,

if you'll tell them to put places." Emotions crowded upon him. He had always complained of a peculiarly limp handshake which was characteristic of Susie. Now, as he shook hands with her, he felt a distinct pressure. Then he saw that she was looking extraordinarily pretty in her slim, remote way. Then he realized that the dream of these last months—the dream of having Susie in the white cottage—might perfectly have come true, and that he had deliberately chosen to bring her to dine in the comparative publicity of the school instead. He was surprised at himself. He thought that in a few minutes he would see Elise, and that she would see Susie, and would probably guess the whole thing, and that anything might happen. And all the time Mrs. Rolles was being gracious and Susie beautiful—her face relaxing into one of her faint smiles each time she met his eye.

In the mean time Miss Curtis was saying to herself: "Oh yes, this is the happy, lovely being whose picture stands on his desk. I see it all now. Oh, I do hope she is worthy of him."

And Miss Hayes was thinking: "Yes, I remember this old person. She brought the girl here once to enter her, and did not want

her to study algebra for fear of destroying the perfect irrationality of her mental processes. Stupid people."

A loud sudden gong sounded. Dinner was ready.

The whole school was seated when Austin with his visitors entered and made his way toward the senior table. Mrs. Rolles at once picked out Elise.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "isn't that Mr. Johns's little granddaughter? Do let her sit next to me."

Nothing was easier. Austin sat down with Mrs. Rolles on his right and Elise next to her, Susie on his left, and Miss Hayes beyond.

"How have you been, Austin?" said Susie, softly.

Now it is well, though perhaps subconsciously, known that between lovers this question really means: How have you borne up under the intolerable agony of our separation? And so it was a surprise to Susie when Austin, who seemed more ready to turn his head to the right than to the left, answered:

"I've been very busy."

She knew what this meant—that his mind had been occupied with things other than

herself. The only hope was that he said it with the deliberate intention of annoying herself; if that were so, he would not want to talk about the things that had been occupying him—he would want to talk about her.

"Tell me what you've been doing," she said, and saw, with a sinking heart, that he was going to obey her.

She leaned her elbows on the table—a thing the girls of the Bevans school were never allowed to do—and inclined her ear to his recital. While she was saying aloud, "Really, I had no idea of it," or, "Oh, do tell me more about it," she was thinking in her heart, "The fickle, blind creature, he doesn't care anything about me at all."

Suddenly she interrupted him. "And haven't you thought about your friends a bit, Austin?"

He looked surprised at this change of idea, when he had supposed her to be so much interested, but answered, "*Thinking* is all some of my friends allow me to do about them."

This sounded more promising. She lowered her voice. "I was going to tell you, Austin. Mamma sees that forbidding you the house doesn't work—has just the oppo-

site effect to what she meant. One doesn't forget the people one is forbidden to think of. You are to be allowed to come as often as you like."

"Susie!" he cried, throwing a great deal of pleasure into his voice, and then, to his utter astonishment, he discovered that he was not nearly so glad as he had been about to declare himself. What could be the reason? He ran hastily over the possibilities and found one that would do very well. "Ah," he said, "it's almost too late, now."

"Too late?" said Susie, sharply.

"I'm not going to be in this part of the world very much longer, I'm afraid." That very morning the formal offer in writing from the directors had been accepted.

"You don't mean," said Susie, "that you are going to abandon your school?"

For the first time in his life he felt a quick, an almost domestic irritation against the ideal creature at his side.

"Well, you needn't shout about it," he said. "I have not mentioned it to any one here yet." And he turned quickly to see if Susie's words could have reached to the farther side of Mrs. Rolles.

"I didn't shout," answered Susie, crossly.

"Really, Austin, I don't think running a girls' school has improved your manners."

Austin smiled. "I'm sorry," he said. "I was thinking you were one of my pupils, and we are very particular about voices."

He felt he must hear what was going on to his right. Not a word reached him, but something tense and tragic in the tone of the little princess's voice carried him back to the interview at Mr. Johns's party. What could Mrs. Rolles be telling her? Hardly that he and Susie were engaged, for they weren't. He leaned forward and caught Miss Hayes's eye.

"I was just thinking Miss Rolles ought to hear our course on voice-placing," he said.

"Oh, do tell me about it," said Susie, with rage in her heart, for she saw perfectly she was being side-tracked. As soon as Miss Hayes began to answer, Austin's head turned to the right, and Mrs. Rolles began at once:

"Elise and I were having such an interesting talk about the relative advantages of a head-master and head-mistress, and we have decided"—she nodded gaily at Elise—"haven't we, my dear, that both can be combined if you will only marry wisely, Mr. Bevans."

His heart stood still; what implications might not have been made in the course of that discussion? He tried to see her face, but she kept dodging behind Mrs. Rolles, and then suddenly, just as he had thought up a question which would oblige her to look at him (it was going to be nothing more original than "How are you, Elise?"), she rose unsteadily, murmured something in the direction of Miss Hayes, who was supposed to be the head of the table, and left the room.

"She looks very fragile," said Mrs. Rolles. "I should be worried about her if I were Mr. Johns."

"She hasn't seemed a bit vigorous since the holidays," said Miss Hayes, rising to follow her.

"She's a pathetic little creature," said Susie to Austin, and added, in a lower voice, "and so ridiculously in love with that fat Boyd boy."

"Is she?" said Austin.

"Engaged, I believe," answered Susie. "It's strange, but I never could take the least interest in a man unless he were thin," and she allowed her eyes to rest flatteringly on Austin's leanness.

"Your treatment soon reduces the weight,"

Austin answered, wondering if Miss Hayes would ever come back. "David tells me he's lost ten pounds."

"David!" exclaimed Susie, as if it were an impertinence for David to have lost an ounce on her account. Then she added, with a smile, "Have *you* been losing weight, Austin?"

"My weight never varies very much," he answered, and cut the meal short by rising to his feet.

He admitted to himself one disadvantage of being the masculine head of a feminine institution—a head-mistress would have gone straight to the bedside of a sick pupil, whereas he, the only person who really understood her, was obliged to content himself with sending Miss Curtis, running upstairs like a rabbit, to bring him word.

"You must take us over and show us your dear little cottage," said Mrs. Rolles.

"Just as soon as Miss Curtis comes back with news of Elise," he answered.

"One trouble with her is she doesn't eat anything," said Mrs. Rolles. "Girls go through an age, you know, when they think it's romantic to starve themselves."

"Didn't she eat anything at all?" asked Austin, seriously.

Mrs. Rolles laughed. "Why, you are conscientious about your pupils," she said. The words stabbed him like a knife.

Miss Curtis's report was vague—Elise was overtired and had gone to bed. Miss Hayes had moved her into the infirmary so that she should not be disturbed by Sally.

He took his guests to the cottage then, and Susie sat down at once in the great blue arm-chair, where he always pictured her sitting. He looked at her pale hair against the dark velvet, but the actuality did not give him the pleasure which the dream had never failed to bring.

CHAPTER VII

IT was ten o'clock before the lights of the repaired motor were seen in the drive, and by the time the ladies had found their wraps and said good-by, and come back to ask Austin to dine the following Saturday, and said good-by again, and come back to ask him if he had noticed whether Mrs. Rolles had been wearing her motor veil when she came in, and had said good-by for the last time and finally gone, it was a good deal later.

It was a lovely spring evening; a half-moon with an edge as sharp as polished steel was shining over the water. Mrs. Rolles settled back into her corner of the car, and as they turned out upon the highway she observed, conversationally, to her daughter:

"That is certainly an unusually attractive young man. If I were your age, Susie, I should be quite desperately in love with him."

"Why, mamma," cried Susie, with some-

thing as near emotion as she had ever displayed, "how can you say that, when it has been you that separated us? And now he doesn't care a sixpence about me."

There was a brief silence. Mrs. Rolles could take defeat like a lady.

"It's strange," she said, calmly, "how many intelligent women there are—and I think you intelligent, my dear—who suppose that in a love-affair indifference is a power. It is, on the contrary, the greatest weakness. Every woman who really loves a man can take him away from any woman who doesn't, no matter what their relative charms are. If you had cared for Austin Bevans—"

"But I did," cried the exasperated Susie; "at least I would have, if you had let me."

"You would have, but you didn't," replied her mother. "Whereas that little Benedotti girl—one of the most determined people I ever saw—"

"Mamma, that little mouse *determined?*"

Mrs. Rolles nodded. "Yes, you should have seen her expression of fanatical resolution when I told her about your engagement to Austin Bevans."

"You told her we were engaged?"

Mrs. Rolles drew her wraps about her. "Not in set terms, of course, for that would

not have been true. But I said how hard it was for a parent to be stern and stand between a young couple who really loved each other. She saw what I meant. That was why she nearly fainted. You wouldn't faint, Susie, no matter who was engaged."

"Certainly not," said Susie, haughtily.

"No," her mother went on, reflectively—"no, you would just feel sulky and vindictive and insulted about it, but that, my dear child, is not love."

Susie, who was engaged in feeling all the things her mother had said, refused to answer and they drove home in absolute silence.

After they had gone Austin, finding that the lights of the school had been put out and that it was too late to hear anything more about Elise that evening, went and sat on the sea-wall and gave himself up to what he supposed was thought. As a matter of fact, he opposed nothing like a mental process to the waves of emotion that swept over him.

He went to bed late, and had hardly fallen asleep when he was wakened by the telephone from the school buildings. It was six o'clock, and Miss Curtis was telling him that Elise Benedotti had disappeared.

"There's a note here she left for you, Mr. Bevans. Shall we open it?"

"No," shouted Austin so that the telephone reverberated. "I'll be over there in five minutes."

He was as good as his word. Five minutes later he was standing in the empty infirmary with Miss Curtis. Elise's little lace-edged nightgown and blue dressing-gown were lying on the bed; her pale-blue slippers were kicked off, one on one side of the room and one on the other.

Her note said: "Please don't be angry at me, but I could not bear it any longer. I shall be quite safe where I am going."

He was able to draw his breath again. That did not sound like suicide.

By ten o'clock, when Mr. Johns arrived upon the scene, everything had been done that might promise a clue. George had been snatched from the family breakfast-table and brought before Austin to testify to his innocence, which turned out to be spotless. Sally had been reduced to tears by a rapid though not hostilely intended cross-examination, and had revealed that she knew nothing. The ticket-agent at the nearest railroad station had testified that no one answering the description of Elise had bought a

ticket, but then the school was in easy reach of a network of trolleys that opened avenues not only to New York, but to the whole of New England. Miss Curtis had had a series of preposterous inspirations as to what had become of Elise, which, proving ridiculous, overwhelmed her with shame, and yet left her equally credulous when the next idea occurred to her.

Mr. Johns arrived in a state of mind very similar to that of the Queen in *Alice in Wonderland*, that if something wasn't done about it in less than no time he would have everybody executed all round.

He was ushered into Miss Curtis's little office, where she, Austin, Sally, and George were already assembled. His approaching grunts could be heard before he actually appeared in the doorway, his black derby pushed back, his spring overcoat unbuttoned, and the collar turned up on one side, his gloves and stick in his hand.

"Where's my granddaughter?" he said. Miss Curtis gave a low moan.

The inquiry made Austin angry. "We're trying to find out, Mr. Johns," he said, politely. "Didn't you understand that that was why we telephoned you? She's run away."

"Well, this is the hell of a school," shouted Mr. Johns. "Teach girls charm, you say—teach 'em to be damned vagrants. D'yer think parents pay you to lose their children for them? Could do that for ourselves if we had a mind to. Where is Elise, that's what I want to know?"

The mere volume of sound of these remarks was like a blow. Sally and Miss Curtis both began to cry again, and even George set his jaw in a nervous sort of spasm.

"Mr. Johns," said Austin, "you must not shout."

"I—I?" said Johns, too surprised to shout as loud as he wanted to do.

"You see," said Austin, "every one in this room is under a great tension, and I cannot allow them to be subjected to being shouted at. If shouting would find Elise I wouldn't complain, but it won't."

Now this made Mr. Johns really angry—something that, in spite of all his imitation rages, very seldom happened to him. He grew perfectly calm, stopped grunting, and spoke in a low voice.

"Look here, young man," he said, "this is where you and I part company. I meant to make you financially, and now I mean to

ruin you. D'yer understand? And I can do it, too, in about a week, ruin your damned school, and keep you out of any other job. Is that clear?"

"It's perfectly clear," answered Austin, "and if I could put any attention on it, I should feel badly about it. As it is, it doesn't matter to me at all. Now have you any idea as to where Elise might have gone?"

"If I had," said Mr. Johns, "you are the last person I'd tell about it. I don't trust you."

"You don't trust me simply because you don't like what I said about your shouting," said Austin. "Is that sensible?"

"Don't you worry about whether I'm sensible or not," said Mr. Johns.

"No, I'll give you my word I won't," answered Austin, and left the room. In the hall he came face to face with Miss Hayes. Suddenly the idea occurred to him that Miss Hayes had been avoiding him all the morning. She tried to slip past now, but he stopped her.

"Miss Hayes," he said, "where is Elise?"

She laughed. "Why, Mr. Bevans," she answered, "if I knew, don't you think I would have told you long ago?"

"I think you would if you knew positively. I'm not sure you would tell me what you thought likely."

Again she tried to go on.

"Miss Hayes, do you want me to find Elise?"

"I want her to be found."

"Will you tell me everything you know bearing on the situation?"

She shook her head.

"Then," he said, firmly, "I think we'll break your three-year contract with the school. If you and I can't work together we won't try."

"You dismiss me?"

"Yes." There was a tense silence, and then he added: "It may be just as well for you, anyhow. Mr. Johns is in there and threatens to ruin the school within a week."

"Does he, indeed?" said Miss Hayes, with a movement of her head, and disappeared instantly into Miss Curtis's study.

Austin went back to his own cottage. It was the first instant he had been alone, and he wanted, since he was evidently to play his hand unaided, to think over the facts. He meant to find Elise before he slept that night. He meant to find her before George or Miss Hayes or Mr. Johns did, and yet

he worked under difficulties, for all of them knew her life well enough to know if there were any friend or relation or old family servant to whom, under the circumstances, she might be likely to go. He went over the catalogue of the school, looking for the address of some classmate not too far away to whom she might have fled. And then, not knowing exactly why, he turned to Miss Hayes's name and read, "Home address, Fairweather, Connecticut."

The automobile book revealed that Fairweather was a small village about sixty miles over the New York border. Further search showed that it was accessible by trolley. The conviction that she was evidently there came instantly to Austin with the finality of conviction in dreams, with the finality that mystics tell us is the characteristic of absolute truth. He looked at his watch. Time had slipped away; it was noon. He got out the geranium-colored car and with no further words to any one he started north and east.

The western part of the state of Connecticut is well watered. Austin drove for miles along the edge of a winding river brimming full to its low green banks, and then crossed a darker, wilder, wider stream. There were

no traffic policemen in these remote highways and he drove fast. But the village of Fairweather was not so easily discovered. There was East Fairweather and South Fairweather, to say nothing of Fairweather Corners, which led him quite fifteen miles out of his way. About six o'clock in the afternoon he was informed that the place he was looking for was probably Fairweather Post Office.

Fairweather Post Office was a very small village strung along a wide village street, and he soon found the Hayes house—a thin, high-shouldered little house, backed by solid square barns and wood-sheds—all painted freshly white to welcome the spring. The geranium-colored car looked very exotic standing before that chaste New England domicile in the twilight.

An old servant with sleek hair and spectacles came to the door, not hostile, but indicating by her observing eye that she was more interested in truth than cordiality. Could he see Mrs. Hayes? She would ask Miss Mary. He was shown into the bleak little parlor and waited. This was to him the most trying period of the day. If Elise wasn't there, he had lost her. Now and then he heard voices in the distance—not hers. What were they doing, all these

old women, he thought, impatiently—putting on their best shawls to tell him that he had lost his love?

Presently the door opened and Mrs. Hayes and Miss Mary came in—both in their way very like his Miss Hayes; it was evidently a family that ran true to type. They had the same manner that the servant had—the same manner that all New-Englanders seem to have toward strangers, of conscientiously suspending judgment, which, sooner or later, for good or evil, they will be obliged to pass upon you.

"You wanted to see me?" said Mrs. Hayes, and her daughter stood beside her ready to protect her from blue-eyed strangers in a high state of nervous excitement.

"Yes," said Austin. "My name is Bevans. I am the head of the school where your daughter teaches."

"Where my daughter used to teach?" said Mrs. Hayes. "I understand you no longer need her services."

Austin was startled. "The news reached you quickly."

"I had a telegram from my daughter."

What else was in that telegram? Austin's hopes rose. "Of course," he said, "I could not really get on without your daughter."

Mrs. Hayes smiled, a peculiar, dry smile not indicative of amusement. "Less than you suppose, perhaps," she said.

She seemed to Austin a puzzling, sinister old female, but he had no time to waste and pressed on: "One of our pupils has run away—Elise Benedotti. Is she here?"

They looked surprised.

"Do you mean is she in this house?"

"Exactly."

"No," said Miss Mary.

"No," said Mrs. Hayes.

"You mean you can't tell me anything about her?"

"We can tell you nothing about her," they said, together. Then Mrs. Hayes rose and added, "May we offer you anything to eat before you go?"

"No, thank you," said Austin, picking up his cap from a chair. The ladies bowed. He forgot to bow. He had failed—failed as a detective, failed as a schoolmaster, and failed most ignominiously as a lover.

It was quite dark when he went out. The moon, the same moon he had seen the night before shining on the Sound, was shining now a little larger and brighter, but its light did not penetrate through the thick unfolding leaves of the elms. Nothing

more clearly indicated the distress that Austin was suffering than the fact that he had left his car standing on the highroad and hadn't remembered to turn on the lights. Yet even after he realized this he did not hurry; he stood an instant on the little porch and bent his head over the match as he lit his cigarette. He knew the smoke drifted back into the house, and he hoped the ladies hated the smell as much as he supposed they did.

With his eyes dazzled by the flare of the match, he felt his way down the path, through the neat little gate, and got into his car. Then, as he put his foot out to the self-starter, he touched something—another foot. Some one was in the car already. He put out his hands and met two small, minute hands, trembling familiarly.

"Elise!" he said.

There was no answer. He caught her to him and they kissed each other—a long, unanswerable kiss.

After an instant he said, "Why did you run away?"

"I thought you loved that other girl."

"Oh yes, I remember. I thought so, too, once."

"I knew if you didn't you would find me."

"You might have left me some clue."

"I was afraid if I did the others might find it, too."

"I had absolutely no reason for thinking you were here."

"No, except I wanted you so much."

"Elise!"

"Don't let's talk now. Drive on."

He turned on his lights, shoved in his gears, and the car made its way through the mild April night, through open farming country and quiet villages and down into cool little hollows where noisy brooks were running. They drove a long time without speaking, too wise to interrupt the silence with anything so inadequate as speech. And then suddenly they realized that, though they never intended to be parted again this side of the grave, they might never have another opportunity to explain how they had felt on first seeing each other, when it was that the unique character of their emotion had first thrust itself upon their conscious attention, and, "Do you remember the day?" and "Had you any idea what I meant when—" It appeared, for the human mind is a wonderful mechanism, that they remembered not only every time they had ever been together, but that they

remembered it in the utmost detail—every word that had been spoken, every time their eyes had met, every feeling that had swept them, and no story that was ever written, no drama ever produced, was followed with such intense interest as these two gave to the unfolding of the incidents of this simple plot, whose dénouement they had both known for the past hour.

And then the car required gasolene, and it occurred to Austin that it would be wise to telephone the school that he had Elise and would be back before midnight. The garage was in a back street of a prosperous Connecticut town, and it happened there was a lunch-wagon near, and Austin thought he would like a cup of coffee, and Elise, it appeared, had never known what lunch-wagons were for, but had rather vaguely supposed they distributed time-tables, and so Austin had insisted that she come with him, and they had two cups of coffee, and she considered it an immense adventure. And almost at once after this, though twenty miles or more were traversed, they found themselves outside the school gates, and they kissed each other once more because that keeps up the courage.

"Your grandfather will be angry, you

know, Elise," Austin explained. "He and I quarreled like mad this morning."

"You quarreled with everybody this morning."

"Yes, that's the way it affects me—to have you run away."

"What does it matter really about grandfather? We'll live and run the school together. We can't be married until I graduate, you know."

"Oh, I don't know. I'd give you a diploma even if you were my wife."

They had rather expected a demonstration on their return, but no one appeared to welcome them except Miss Curtis. Mr. Johns had gone to bed, she said, after receiving word of their approach, in a state bedroom next the infirmary kept especially for parents; at least he had gone up-stairs.

He did not thus, however, escape his granddaughter, who, drawing Austin after her, went straight to his door—knocking upon it as she opened it—a very annoying habit.

Mr. Johns, in a black silk dressing-gown lined with crimson satin, was sitting under an electric light, reading a magazine. He looked up over his rimmed spectacles and said, in an alarmingly calm and determined tone:

"I cannot be disturbed to-night, Elise. I will speak to you in the morning."

"Why, grandfather, what a beautiful dressing-gown that is! You look like an Old Master in it—just that crimson flash about the ankle where it falls back."

"Shut the door when you go out," said Mr. Johns, pretending that he was still reading.

"Yes, I will," said the little princess, sitting down on the edge of his bed.

"Don't sit on the bed!" roared Mr. Johns. "Uncomfortable enough without that, I expect."

"Well, where shall I sit?" she asked, as one who only asked for guidance.

"Go to bed," said Mr. Johns, and this time he turned a page and peered at the top of the next one.

"Mr. Johns," said Austin, "I must tell you that Elise and I mean to be married."

They waited, expecting a grunt, and the silence was even more terrifying. At this point, utterly disregarding realism, Mr. Johns turned over another page.

"Yes," said Elise, "we're going to be married and live here and run the school."

"Sure about that?" asked Mr. Johns.

"Sure," answered Elise.

Mr. Johns gave a familiar grunt. "Better find out who owns the school first," he said.

"Who owns it?" said Austin, sharply.

Mr. Johns read on; it was his moment of triumph. He was reading so hard that he did not see the swift approach of his granddaughter, who snatched the magazine from his hands.

"Tell us what you mean, grandfather," she said, sternly.

"Supposed you knew—thought you young people knew everything."

"Tell us what you mean. Doesn't Austin own this school?"

Mr. Johns shook his head: "The will's found—Miss Hayes," was all he said.

It was a blow, particularly to Austin, but Elise rallied at once.

"All right, then, grandfather, you've got to give him that job you promised."

"Nothing of the kind—don't trust him—don't want him working for me."

"Grandfather," said Elise, sternly, "I heard you tell Mrs. Rolles at supper the other night that his financial future was assured. You said that he had flare—creative genius, and that when you saw that sort of thing you snapped it up—"

"I've changed my mind," said Mr. Johns,

with a roar, and girls sleeping in far-distant dormitories woke, supposing a spring thunder-storm was approaching.

"Yes, and I heard you telling several of your friends over the telephone the next day that any corporation that Mr. Bevans worked for would be sure of—"

"What d'yer mean by listening to what I say over the telephone?"

"I don't listen, grandfather, but no one can help hearing."

"I tell you I've changed my mind about him."

"You know, Mr. Johns," said Austin, "I can earn my living, and Elise's, too."

"Yes, grandfather dear," said Elise, "we mean to do it—though of course you can make it awfully hard and disagreeable for us."

"Get out of my room, both of you," said Mr. Johns. "A nice mess you're going to make of your life, miss."

Elise turned with a happy smile to Austin. "I knew grandfather would come round," she said, somewhat to her lover's surprise, for he did not immediately see consent in Mr. Johns's last phrase. "Isn't he a lamb—particularly with his hair all mussed like that?"

Mr. Johns scowled terrifically. "Well, no one ever called me a lamb before," he said.

"No one understands you but me, grandfather darling," said Elise. "Good night," and, kissing him quite against his inclination, she went away.

In the hall she turned ecstatically to Austin. "Isn't it wonderful that grandfather's so pleased?" she said.

Austin hesitated. "Well," he said, "do you feel sure that he—"

"Oh yes, he's delighted—that's his way. Oh, isn't everything in the world perfect?"

At this moment they perceived Miss Hayes was standing near, waiting for them.

"I wanted to explain to you, Mr. Bevans," she said. "We found the will in the school safe to-day. Miss Curtis has had it put away all the time, under the impression it was the inventory. You know, Mrs. Bevans had always told me she meant to leave the school to me."

Austin sighed.

"I don't suppose," he said, "that you will carry out one of my ideas."

"Not one," said Miss Hayes. "All my girls are going to college."

He tried to smile, although in spite of his

brilliant prospects he did not like having his school taken away. "And you won't even offer me a job?" he said.

"You would be very valuable as an interviewer of parents."

"I did not make much of a hit with yours. Your mother treated me like a criminal."

"I had just telegraphed her not to allow Elise to see you under any circumstances."

"Yes," said Elise, "they made me go out of the house when they knew Austin was coming, so they could say truthfully that I wasn't in it. And so I just went and sat in the car and waited for him. Did you know that we were in love with each other, Miss Hayes?"

Miss Hayes smiled rather grimly. "I think most people knew about your feelings, Elise," she replied, "and I own that I suspected Mr. Bevans. Now you must go to bed, or you'll be seriously ill."

Elise turned to say good night to Austin. "Will you do something for me," she said, "as soon as you go into your cottage? Will you burn the picture of that horrid girl that stands on your desk and made me so unhappy?"

Austin hesitated just the fraction of a second. "I'd rather give it to a friend of

mine who wants it more than anything in the world."

Elise clapped her hands. "Oh, that would be better," she said; "or perhaps I mean worse." And with one long look over her shoulder, which said clearly that she considered him absolutely perfect, she allowed herself to be led away by Miss Hayes.

THE END

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